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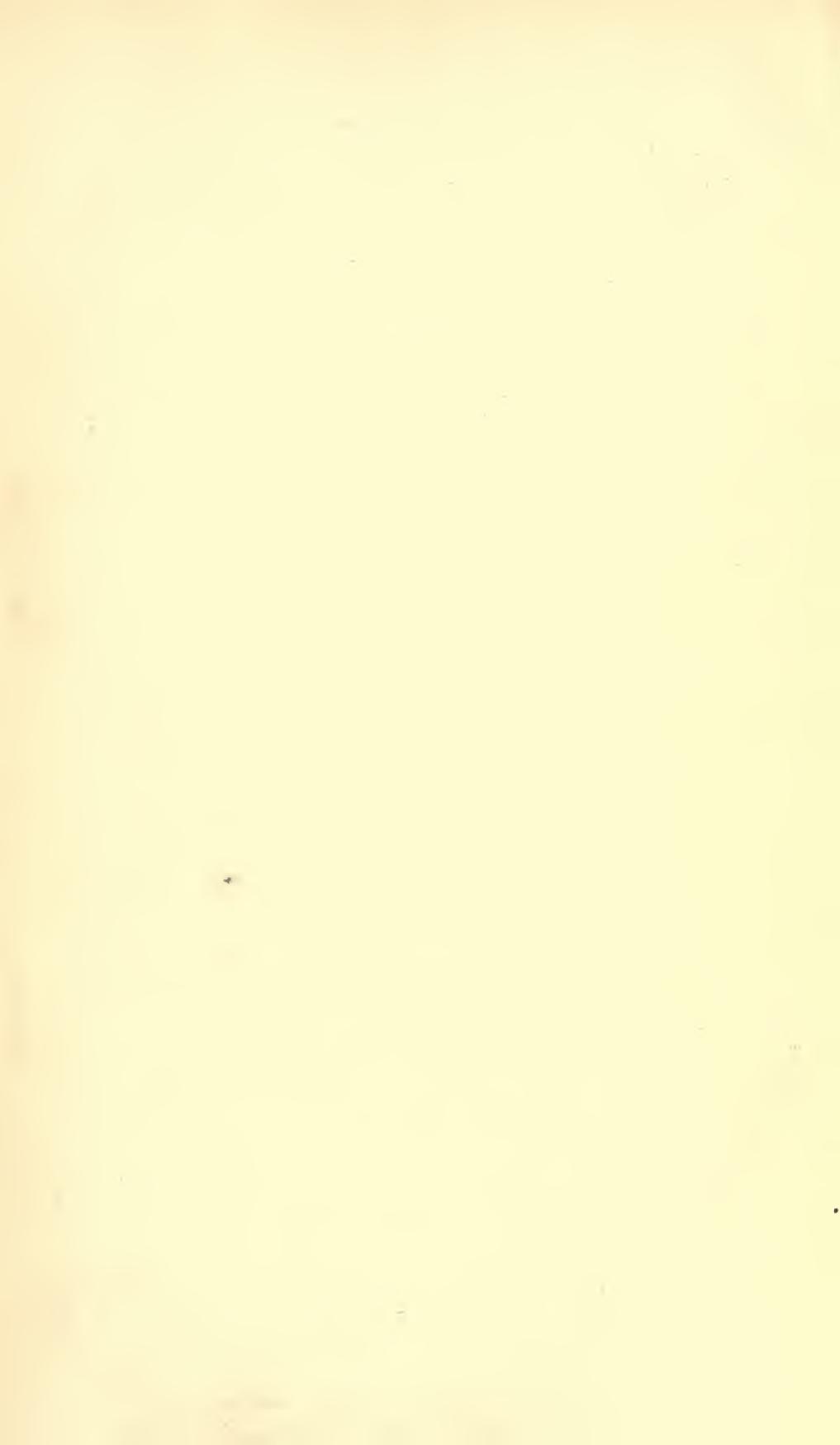
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# NEW AND OLD (SERMONS),

A MONTHLY REPERTORY OF CATHOLIC PULPIT ELOQUENCE

EMBRACING

TWO SERMONS FOR EACH SUNDAY

AND

HOLY-DAY OF OBLIGATION

OF THE

# ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR.

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EDITED,

(IN CONJUNCTION WITH MANY OTHER CLERGYMEN,) 

BY

**Rev. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O.S.B.**

ELIZABETH, N. J.

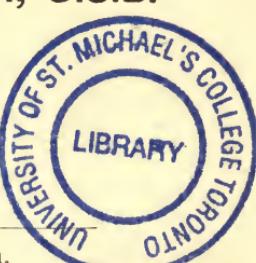
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REV. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O. S. B.

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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### THE LAST JUDGMENT.

*"And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty." —Luke xxi: 27.*

Shall I tell you without reserve of what I wish to speak to-day? Shall I tell you that being struck with terror at the mere thought of the judgments which God will inflict upon the last day, I must endeavor to communicate that terror to your hearts; to arouse sinners, as it were, by a cry of alarm; and, if possible, to rescue them from their fatal lethargy, before they shall find it changed into the sleep of everlasting death? Yes, learn it, you who hear me, it is not with a view of astonishing your imaginations with unmeaning pictures, not with the view of producing feeble and transient emotions in your hearts, but in the hope of effecting your conversion and salvation, that I shall exhibit to your spiritual vision the most sublime, the most awful spectacle that religion can offer to the eye of faith. Unite with me in contemplating this last and fearful scene, the bare thought of which, in former times, filled the deserts with solitaries, and forced St. Jerome, although exhausted with works of piety and austerity, and St. Hilarion, though emaciated by fasts, disciplines, and vigils, to tremble in the inmost depths of their solitudes.

But, perhaps, you may say, since every one of us at the hour of death is destined to receive an irrevocable sentence, which must then decide our fate for eternity, is it not that private and particular judgment which we ought chiefly to fear? And why should we suffer our minds to be so much engrossed by thoughts of that other and later judgment which will be nothing more, after all, than a solemn promulgation—and confirmation of the preceding one? These questions I propose to answer to-day by showing you how much the general judgment must add to the severity of the particular one; and by explaining to you how it fills up the measure of the divine vengeance, and effects the complete abandonment of the sinner. Among the awful events which shall characterize that great day of justice, I select these leading circumstances to which I beg leave to direct your undivided attention.

- I. The resurrection of the body,*
- II. The manifestation of consciences, and*

*III. The final decree which will establish an eternal separation between the elect and the reprobate.*

I. *The resurrection of the body* will be an aggravation of the punishment of the sinner. Cast into the dark prison of hell, from the moment he expired, he endures inexpressible torments in the midst of those fires which shall never be extinguished. It would seem that his misery has already reached its height, but no, his entire being does not yet suffer. His soul, alone, is the prey of those devouring flames. His body, insensible and inanimate, is in the grave. In the midst of her torments that unhappy soul remembers the companion once so dear to her, with whom she had been united during the most blissful period of their joint existence. How great was the happiness she enjoyed in that society! Alas! her misery has dated its commencement from the sad period of their separation. She knows that the revolution of years and of ages is destined to bring about a day, which is known to God alone, a day on which that union, which had been once so agreeable, must be renewed, never more to be interrupted. With anxious impatience she longs for that day, when she may experience some alleviation of her tortures. This last of days at length arrives. The stars in the firmament have already lost their light, the world has been purified by fire; the sound of the fatal trumpet suddenly reaches to the very bowels of the earth and summons the dead of every generation to return to life once more. All nature is at once thrown into confusion; the whole creation is in travail to bring forth the human race, which is about to be born anew. The dust of the tomb is put in motion; the scattered ashes are amalgamated; the bones are formed and joined together; flesh covers them at once; the myriad bodies of the children of men appear with all their limbs, but they are as yet motionless and inanimate. At this decisive moment, the souls hasten from their tenements to be united to their bodies, and to restore them again to life. Hell permits its victims to escape. The reprobate soul rushes from her dismal prison, and is transported with the rapidity of lightning to the spot where her long lost body, the object of so many regrets and of so much affection, is about to be restored to her. In what condition will she find that body?

Let us consult the Sacred Scriptures. What do we read in the Inspired Word of God? That at the last day each one shall reap what he has sown during life; that he who has lived in the corruption of sin, shall never be released from the corruption of death; that the just shall arise again to a new and eternal life, but that the resurrection of the wicked will be a second death, worse than the first; that their bodies will become the living food and never-dying prey of rottenness and worms. If you have ever beheld a dead, decaying body in the coffin, figure to yourself now that melancholy and hideous object; that livid

paleness, those distorted features, that horrible dissolution, those worms that gnaw and consume their disgusting prey; such is the condition in which this body presents itself to the criminal soul, whose idol it had been, the treasure she had long desired, with such ardent wishes and so many sighs, to possess again. "What," she exclaims, "is this that portion of my being which has been so dear to me? Is this my old associate in my labors and my pleasures, in whom I found so much grace and beauty, whom I took so much care to decorate, whose inclinations were my sovereign law?"

"The very same," replies an awful voice. "Recognize it, and renew that alliance which once possessed so many attractions for you." Alas! she shudders, she recoils, she is unable to endure either the sight of this carcass, or the infection which exhales from it. She desires to plunge again into the depths of the dark abyss whence she came, that she may be delivered from so detestable a union. But an invincible power prevents her escape, and thrusts her forward towards that odious object, to which she must again be united by ties that can never more be severed. In the excess of her anguish and despair, she exclaims: "Oh, wretched being! thou wert destined to be the cause of what is more intolerable to me than even hell itself! This then is the place of my rest, for ever and ever! This is the habitation which I have prepared for myself, which I have deliberately chosen: this is what I have preferred to my God, to my conscience, to a never-ending happiness; this is the abominable flesh with which I was willing to identify myself during life!"

In the midst of all these groans and lamentations she enters that body of death, and again endows it with life, to the mutual torment of both flesh and spirit. The flames by which the soul is devoured, communicate themselves instantaneously to the body; they eagerly seize upon their new victim: they encircle it; they permeate it; they rush like a torrent through every vein, through the entrails, through the very marrow of the bones, and the soul endures multiplied torments from every part of this burning body. How is it possible to describe those eyes, blazing with the fire of hell, or the rueful looks which they cast around on every side? Those scalding tears which shall never cease to flow; that hideous mouth, and its terrible gnashing of teeth, which begins, never more to end; that countenance on which a ray of divine beauty formerly shone, but which, in its monstrous deformity, now bears a resemblance to the very devils; those frightful members and the intolerable stench of death which they diffuse all around them? Whithersoever this animated carcass turns its footsteps, there is a universal dispersion and flight, as at the approach of some spectre, or disgusting monster. Oh, what a change! Perhaps this horrible apparition was once a great man, about whose person, when upon earth, numbers eagerly pressed to obtain the honor of a glance or a single smile. Perhaps this other fiery

monster was one of those who are so amiable in the eyes of the world; who form the attraction of every society; who are sought after everywhere; out of whose company no real or perfect pleasure can be found. This hideous female was a celebrated beauty, whose presence was sufficient to attract universal attention; who gloried in captivating every heart; who received incense like a deity. Alas, what a change! Ah! figure to yourselves two reprobates, after a criminal attachment to each other here below, meeting in such a plight upon the last day. What mutual disgust and aversion, what reproaches and imprecations hurled against each other! With what intense shame are they not overwhelmed by the recollection of those abominable pleasures which were once the sole object of their guilty union, the solitary and shameful tie which bound them together! How furious, but how ineffectual is their desire to tear and to destroy each other!

Do you marvel, therefore, that I entreat you, brethren, to have compassion, not only upon your souls, but also upon those bodies which you love with such tender and blind affection? Think of the certain punishment which you are meriting for them by flattering them with such cowardly and criminal indulgence. They are victims which you are fattening for the day of wrath. Will you devote them again, by new and voluntary sins, to a second death, whose consequences must be eternal? Will you be the executioners and the most merciless enemies of yourselves? What answer can you make, who have yet time to guard against this danger? Who has promised you to-morrow? Who can promise it to you; who satisfy you that this very night may not be your last?

II. It might appear that nothing could be wanting to complete the ignominy of the sinner after the moment of the particular judgment; when, freed from the ties of the body, he has been arraigned before the tribunal of the Supreme Judge, convicted of his crimes, and branded with the sentence of eternal reprobation. But, how great soever the confusion which overwhelms him may then be, it is unknown by at least the greater part of his fellow-creatures. Buried in hell, there are no witnesses to his shame, except the wretched beings who are sharers in his sufferings. Perhaps the memory of this miserable man is still honored upon earth; perhaps his ashes still repose there, in a magnificent tomb; perhaps histories are filled with his name, and kingdoms resound with his praises. It is only on the day of justice that this phantom of glory will vanish, and leave no trace behind it; it is only then the sinner shall see himself deprived of even the smallest remnant of honor, reputation or regard; then shall he drain the chalice of infamy, even to the very dregs.

How disgraceful must it not be for the reprobate to appear at that last Day before the whole world, dragging along a hideous and impure

carcass, which makes him an object of aversion to every eye, and stamps him so palpably with the seal of hell! Yet this is but a very feeble prelude, indeed, to the humiliations which are to follow. God is about to fulfill the threat uttered by the lips of His prophets: "Perverse man! thou hast imagined that I would be like thyself, that I would dissemble thy iniquities; come now, that I may exhibit them in the broad daylight, and that I may overwhelm thee with the confusion which thou meritest!"

Behold this just and terrible God tearing away every veil which once covered that corrupt heart, searching with His omnipotent hand into the very bottom of this abyss of iniquities, and drawing out of its depths an alarming multitude of monsters and reptiles, that is to say, of disorders and crimes, the mere sight of which terrifies the sinner himself. Among these, there appear many evil thoughts, many filthy imaginations, many detestable desires, many shameful ideas, many deeds of darkness, which have succeeded each other almost without interruption during a long series of years. There, envy, jealousy, hatred, revenge, treachery, black intrigues, falsehood, calumnies, and conspiracies, exhibit themselves. There may be the sins of infancy, of early youth, of mature years, of disorderly old age; the sins of every day, of every hour, of every moment; each individual's personal sins, and the sins of others of which he or she had been the occasion, the instrument, or the cause; sins of omission,—sins which have been unknown or forgotten until then; sins which those who committed them disguised from themselves, and many which they elevated into virtues; sins of every kind, of every sense, of every member of the body; sins of all the powers and faculties of the soul; enormous sins, and sins which are even nameless, all come forward and exhibit themselves at the same time, so that out of such a countless multitude not even a solitary sin can escape the eyes of the whole universe, and not even one of those circumstances which are most humiliating and oppressive to the sinner will be omitted disguised, or extenuated.

Who will be able to endure this awful manifestation? Then must the mask of the hypocrite, and all the audacity of the shameless sinner, disappear together. What do I hear? Howlings and imprecations that make me shudder. What do I see? I see the victims and accomplices of that guilty man fall upon him from every side, like avenging furies, asking him, in accents of despair, to restore to them that soul, that blissful eternity, which he has caused them to lose forever. "It was you, vile seducer, who plundered me of all that was most precious, my honor, my virtue; you who by your base artifices and detestable passions, have dragged me along with yourself into this abyss of every woe." "It is you, immodest woman, who, by enkindling an impure fire within my bosom, have left me a prey to everlasting flames!" "It was you, unnatural father, barbarous mother, who gave me the first example

of irreligion and licentiousness; who instead of restraining my growing passions, on the contrary rather hastened their development, and set them free from all restraint; behold ! my reprobation is your work." O who can describe the innumerable multitude of unhappy reprobates who shall rise up against each other on that great day of justice ?

But among all the voices that shall then cry out against the sinner, the most violent and most terrible is that which issues from his own bosom. Yes, his conscience, which he had always stifled during his lifetime, which he prevented from groaning or complaining even in secret, set free at length, and restored to all its rights, enraged and furious, roars like a lion, and terrifies and subdues him in its turn. This witness he cannot silence; this inexorable accuser, this furious domestic enemy audibly rehearses the long catalogue of his iniquities and infamies, through the very lips of the culprit himself, and paints in the blackest colors, his hatred of all good, his love of evil, his constant resistance to the light of his own reason, his invariable contempt and abuse of the divine graces, his ingratitude and hatred towards the Author of his being. Then it is, that, heaping reproaches and imprecations upon himself, seeing no monster in the whole universe more detestable than himself not knowing where to conceal his shame, he invokes death and annihilation; he conjures the mountains and hills to fall upon him, and to bury such a mass of wickedness beneath their ruins. But all in vain; he must live to see and to detest himself forever, to bear the intolerable burden of unbounded confusion and disgrace for all eternity. Such, then, is the excess of disgrace which the sinner must endure from the manifestation of conscience.

III. The last act of this great and awful tragedy at length approaches. The brilliant cloud which bears the Son of Man appears in the firmament, and attracts universal admiration. After a short interval of silence, shouts of triumph, hymns of joy, loud acclamations of praise, which shake the vaults of heaven, ascend from every side. The glorified elect, beholding for the first time with their corporeal eyes the adorable humanity of the Word made flesh, are no longer able to contain their transports of joy and love. They exult with delight: soaring aloft, at once, like eagles, in mid-air, they fly into the arms of their Saviour, and, inebriated with heavenly delights, take their position at His right hand. Meanwhile, the sullen, disconsolate, trembling sinner, with his eyes fixed upon the dust, is carried along with the vile assemblage of Satan towards the left. There he hears the virtues proclaimed, and the victory celebrated of those whom he despised, calumniated, or persecuted upon earth; he hears the voice of the King of glory, who, in accents full of tenderness and affection, styles them Blessed of His Father, and invites them to share His inheritance, and take possession of His kingdom. Dark envy

at that supreme happiness of the elect consumes the sinner, and embitters his punishment. To aggravate his mortification and anguish to the utmost, he recognizes among them the old associates of his guilt, who had returned to God in time by a sincere conversion, washed away their sins in the blood of the Lamb, and, remaining faithful to Divine grace to the end of their lives, now reigned as happy penitents in that glorious society of the saints. At such a spectacle he is unable to restrain his cries and groans. "Ah, unhappy wretch that I am," he says to himself, "could I not do what has been done by these, my old companions of the past, who had the same propensities, the same prejudices, the same errors, the same habits, and the same vices as myself? Had I not the same lights, the same remorse, the same graces which have saved them? Senseless being that I was, instead of following their example, I have made their conversion the subject of my foolish and indecent sarcasms; the whole universe applauds their triumphs this day; and here am I (who scoffed at them) for all eternity, the detestation and the outcast of all creation!"

Whilst he abandons himself to the anguish of these tormenting thoughts, the just Judge, having crowned all the Saints, at last turns towards the reprobate and says: "'Depart from Me, ye cursed,' I now break for ever all the ties which united the Creator to rebellious creatures, the Father to unnatural children, the holy God to incorrigible sinners. 'Depart from Me,' who gave you existence and life, who formed you to My likeness, and destined you to be sharers in My own happiness from Me, who bore with your ingratitude and insults so long, who pardoned your crimes so often; from Me, who loved you with such tenderness as even to offer Myself a victim for your sake, to weep, to suffer, to die for you, obtaining nothing but your hatred in return; from Me, the only Author of every blessing, who, rejected by you with scorn, reject you again in My turn; from Me who am benediction itself, but who curse you this day. Unfortunate man! you have loved malefaction, you have chosen it for your inheritance, may it abide with you for ever! Begone from Me to the abode of eternal misery, to that place where the fire is ever burning, yet never consumes; where the never-dying worm devours, yet never destroys. 'Depart from Me into everlasting fire.' These frightful prisons have not been created for man, the beloved work of My Father's hands, but for the rebellious angel, your enemy and Mine. You were well aware that dark hatred exasperated him against you; that the damnation of the human race was the only object of his desires; and you have preferred him to your God. It is but just that you should share his fate, after having embraced his cause and performed his work. 'Depart from Me into everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his associates. ''

After having pronounced their decree, directing towards those mis-

erable beings a parting glance, in which indignation and pity are alike portrayed, the Judge turns away from them forever; and having dispelled the clouds which hang upon His brow, He fixes His eyes upon the assembly of the just, with a smile full of sweetness and majesty, which makes heaven and earth rejoice. The never-ending canticle of praise and thanksgiving immediately begins. At the sound of these concerts, the heavens throw open their portals, and display their entire magnificence to the enraptured eyes of the elect. They straightway ascend into the air, and accompanied by Angels, they enter in the train of the Lamb into the everlasting Jerusalem which resounds with their reiterated exclamations of joy and triumph.

Whilst the reprobate contemplate this spectacle in sullen silence, the earth gives way beneath and around them, and hell, displaying the depths of its prisons, demands its victims with expanded jaws. Then it is that these unfortunate beings, feeling more conscious than ever of the awful nature of their destiny, which they contrast with the happiness of the just, can fix no limits to their despair. Strength and courage abandon them altogether, their hearts are broken; they burst into torrents of tears, and raising their eyes for the last time towards heaven which they shall never more behold—recognizing among those who now enter it, their friends, their fellow-citizens, their relatives, looking upon the places which had been prepared for themselves, but which others now occupy, all the acuteness and intensity of feeling with which they have ever been endued, revives at the moment of this desolating separation. All is consummated. They sink into the burning prison-house, which groans as it swallows up its prey. The gates are closed upon them never more to open. Out of hell there is no redemption.

May the sincerity of your conversion, your faithful co-operation with the divine grace, and the infinite mercy of God preserve you all from such an awful destiny! Amen.

N. T. McCARTHY, S. J.

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### FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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THE WRATHFUL COUNTENANCE OF THE JUDGE WILL BE A TERROR TO THE SINNER.

*“They shall see the Son of Man, coming in a cloud with great power and majesty.”—Luke, xxi: 27.*

Before the day of the general Judgment there shall be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, neither

shall be; for "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and pestilences, and famines, and terrors from heaven. Christians shall be persecuted, thrown into prisons, dragged before kings and magistrates, and put to death for the name of Jesus; there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars, and upon earth great distress of nations. For the powers of heaven shall be moved. Why all this confusion and devastation? The Gospel says: "Because these are the days of vengeance."—*Luke*, xxi: 22. How often would the sun have fallen from heaven rather than be compelled to look down upon the innumerable crimes that were committed by God's creatures in broad daylight—but then the sun shall be darkened, and why? "Because these are the days of vengeance." How often would the moon have refused to shine upon the shameful crimes that were boldly committed beneath her beams—then that same moon will refuse to give her light, and why? "Because these are the days of vengeance." How often would the very air have suffocated and poisoned wicked sinners, as with mephitic gases, if it had been permitted—but then the elements will rebel and rage against them, and why? "Because these are the days of vengeance." All creatures will be enraged and ready to revenge the insults which ungrateful sinners have offered to their Creator. "Then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty," then He shall come not as Redeemer but as Judge with a wrathful countenance. And what effect will this sight have upon the sinner? St. John plainly tells us in the Book of the Apocalypse, where he says: "I saw one like unto the Son of Man," and "His eyes were as a flame of fire, . . . . and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword," (xix., 12, 15), "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."—i., 17. St. John does not say that he heard the voice of the Judge—one glance at His wrathful countenance was sufficient to prostrate him to the ground: and thus I have arrived at the point which I intend to make the subject of our meditation to-day, viz.:

*The wrathful countenance of the Judge will be a terror to the sinner.* When a man commits sin, he dreads nothing more than publicity; he even considers his sin less grievous while it remains secret, and often avoids sin from no other motive than the fear of the eye of his fellow-man. This, however, is only a natural motive; we should be more afraid of the eye of God, who sees us wherever we are, because He is everywhere. If we are not afraid of that all-seeing God whilst in the act of sinning, we surely will be afraid of Him after we have sinned. Thus we read that Adam and Eve hid themselves after their first sin. From whom did they endeavor to hide themselves? From the face of God. But how could they be so silly as to believe that they could hide themselves from the face of God, who sees everything, even our most secret thoughts and actions? In vain did they try to conceal them-

selves amid the trees of Paradise. God had seen them in their state of innocence, He had seen them eating the forbidden fruit, and He saw them as clearly in their guilt and shame striving to hide themselves from His face.

We laugh at the silly endeavor of Adam, and yet we follow in his footsteps. Cain, the first son of Adam, imbrued his hands in the blood of his brother, Abel, and when, after his fratricide, God called him to an account, he broke out into these words: "I shall hide myself from thy face." We do the very same; it is true we do not say it in so many words, but we act it. We say to ourselves as those two wicked judges said to Susanna: "Nobody sees us." But is not God everywhere? Yes, He sees us, although we do not see Him; He sees us where no human eye can penetrate; He beholds us when we are doing good, and when we are doing evil. Did we firmly believe this, we would avoid many sins; we would at least refrain from doing in the sight of God what we should blush to do before man. We cannot see God with our corporal eyes, because He is a spirit, but we can see Him with the eye of faith which teaches us that God is everywhere. To desire to be invisible to the eye of God, is a sin; but not to see God with the eye of faith, is malice. Since it is impossible for the sinner to hide himself from the face of God, he forgets His presence, so that he does not see Him. The royal prophet says: "The ways of sinners are filthy at all times." Why are they filthy? Because God is not before their eyes. The sinner is in the presence of God, but he does not realize it, and for this reason he heaps sin upon sin, and his ways are filthy at all times.

*But the Lord shall be known when He executes judgment.* These words are of great weight. *The Lord shall be known.* Is He not known at present, at least to us who bear the name of Christians, and who call ourselves members and children of His Church? God is known, and He is not known; He is known because being Christians, we believe in His existence and presence; He is not known, whenever we commit mortal sin, because in that case we do not believe with a living faith, that He is everywhere. God is everywhere; and yet we boldly commit every kind of sin, as if He were far from us, as if He could not see us. God is just; and yet we sin as if He were an indifferent God. He is almighty; and we live as if He were powerless. He is a true, living God; and we behave as if He were a false god or an idol. Thus am I justified in saying: *God is not known* in this world, but He shall be known when He executes judgment; for then we shall find out to our grief that God heard, saw, and knew all that we were doing during life; and He will do then what He hath foretold: "I shall Myself manifest to him,"—that is to all men.

God Himself explains the manner of His manifestation in a few but

very significant words by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah: "I am the *Judge* and the *Witness*." A double remembrance which will thus terrify sinners on the last day. That of the Witness who will reproduce and bring before their minds all their sins and iniquities; and at the same time, that of the Judge who will pronounce sentence upon them in His wrath. In vain will they endeavor on that day to close their eyes, for they shall be opened against their will. The first thing revealed to the wicked then and there shall be the face of Christ, as the face of a witness, who shall show forth all their sins as in a faithful mirror. All sins and crimes, together with the circumstance of time, of place, of person, of number, manner, and intention, shall be exposed to the eyes of the world. God said to David: "Thou didst it secretly: but I will do this in the sight of all Israel and in the sight of the sun."—*II. Kings*, xii.: 12. The all-seeing Witness shall manifest every detail, which we so artfully concealed, to the gaze of the whole world.

In the fifth chapter of the book of Daniel we read that Balthasar the king, made a great feast for a thousand of his nobles. He commanded his servants to bring the vessels of gold and silver which Nabuchadonossor his father had taken from the temple of Jerusalem; and they drank wine out of them; and in the same hour there appeared the fingers, as it were, of the hand of a man writing over against the candle-stick upon the surface of the wall. The king beheld the joints of the hand that wrote, and his countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him; the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees struck against each other. He sent for the wise men, the Chaldeans and soothsayers, to read for him that writing, but they could neither read nor explain it to the king. Daniel was sent for, and he read and interpreted the writing on the wall, saying: "This is the writing that is written: 'Mane, Thecel, Phares,' and this is the interpretation: Mane: God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thecel: Thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting. Phares: Thy kingdom is divided and is given to the Medes and Persians." And so it was. Balthasar was slain that very night, and Darius, the Mede, succeeded to his kingdom.

Balthasar beheld only the joints of the hand that wrote and he was terrified. On that day of judgment we shall see not only the hand but also the face of the God-Man. His eye saw all that we did from the very moment we attained the use of reason; His hand wrote down all our thoughts, words, deeds and omissions contrary to the law of God, and we shall be judged according to the very things which we have done in the flesh, whether good or evil. Sinners! what answer will you make when the contents of that book shall be read to you? The hand of the Writer is not unknown, it is the hand of Him who saw, and that hand wrote nothing but what the eye beheld. "I am He that has seen it,"

says the Lord; "can you contradict what My hand wrote, can you deny what Mine eye saw?" Whither then will sinners turn? To the mountains and rocks they will cry out: "Fall upon us and hide us from the face of him who sitteth on the throne."

But the mountains and rocks will be heartless, and will neither hear nor heed the cry of sinners. They will not fall upon them; they will remain immovable, for it is not enough for those unhappy souls to see the face of the Witness, they must also see the face of the Judge, who will pronounce the sentence which His hand has written. And what sentence has His hand written? The same that appeared of old on the palace-wall of king Balthasar. "Mane, Thecel, Phares." "God has numbered thy kingdom and finished it, that is He has numbered all your sins. You are weighed in the balance, and found wanting. The right and title to the kingdom of heaven, for which you were created, is taken from you forever, and given to converts from Judaism and Paganism." This is the interpretation of the Judge Himself, who says in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "I say unto you, many shall come from the East and the West and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into exterior darkness."

The Judge will execute judgment with a wrathful countenance. His eyes will be as a flame of fire. Sinners, what terror shall you experience when you behold with your own eyes those fiery eyes of the Judge! I find a reflex or semblance of this terror in various instances cited in Holy Writ. After the queen of Sheba had seen the face of Solomon, there was no more spirit in her, she was astonished above measure. Of Esther we read that when, contrary to the express prohibition of the king, she appeared in his presence, she was unspeakably terrified, for the Scripture says: "He was terrible to behold, and when he had lifted up his countenance, and with burning eyes had shown the wrath of his heart, the queen sank down and her color forsook her." When Joseph of Egypt made himself known to his brethren, saying: "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt,"—his brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear. How then will it be, when the Judge of the living and the dead like Joseph will say: "I am Jesus, whom you have sold for a trifle? I am Jesus, who have witnessed all your thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions; I am Jesus, in whose presence you have sinned, whose justice you have contemned, whose omnipotence you have ridiculed, whose mercy you have abused. I am Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who sought you when you strayed away from the flock, who raised you up when you fell. I am Jesus, who loved you to such a degree as to shed My blood for you. I am Jesus, who did all that I could for you. For your sake I have been scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified; and you, by your sins

have unceasingly renewed My wounds and death. I knew you before you had an existence, but you would not know Me. You would not look upon Me as your Saviour,—now O sinner! behold Me as your Judge!"

What terror and consternation! How will sinners be able to stand such a crushing scrutiny? We may well say, that we cannot bear to hear such words; but whither shall they fly, those listeners, those witnesses of an outraged Judge? They shall go,—but whither? Not being able to endure any longer the sight of an angry God, they will go into everlasting fire. Few words, but words of very great importance. They shall go into everlasting fire! They will not be cast into it, but they will *go* of their own accord. And what is the reason of their voluntary going into this terrible fire? It is St. Chrysologus, (and not I,) who gives the answer: They will go into everlasting fire, for, in that hour, it will seem easier to them to suffer the torments of hell than to behold the wrathful countenance of the Judge.

Who shall see on that day the wrathful countenance of Christ as Judge and Witness? Whose lot will it be? Let us search for our answer in the history of the two wicked judges and Susanna. The wicked judges suggested to Susanna a thing which never entered her mind ever for a moment, for she was a woman who feared the Lord. Enticing her to consent to their shameful and sinful proposal, they said: "Behold, the doors of the orchard are closed, and nobody sees us." What was Susanna's reply to their criminal language? She said: "I am straitened on every side, for if I do this thing it is death to me, and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands," (that is, although innocent, you will accuse and condemn me), "nevertheless it is better to fall into your hands than to sin in the sight of the Lord." Let us attentively consider and weigh the difference between these words, that we may come to see the difference between their effects. The two judges were without the fear of God; the heart of Susanna was filled with it. To be without fear, and to be full of fear,—what a difference! And whence does this difference arise? The two wicked judges said: "Nobody sees us;" whereby they plainly showed that they had not God before their eyes. But Susanna with heroic courage said: "All the evil of the world shall fall upon me, rather than I should sin in the sight of God"—professing thereby that she feared the Lord. Now, to return to our subject: Who shall see the wrathful countenance of Christ as Judge on the last day? Those who have not feared Him during life, and have perished in their sins. Surely those who, with Susanna, fear the Lord and have Him always before their eyes will not then behold Him as an angry Judge, but as a loving Father, and therefore will not be terrified; but to those who follow in the footsteps of the wicked judges, and walk not before Him in this world, the Lord will be terrible to behold.

on that day when He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

How shall we, my brethren, who have so often sinned before His all-seeing eyes venture then to appear in His sight? We fear the eye of man, and we take no heed of the Omniscient Eye of God. Must we not acknowledge that we do not believe in the presence of God with a living faith? Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may see, and understand, and firmly believe that Thou seest all. We resolve to walk in Thy sight, and to sin no more. With this holy resolution we beseech Thee, each one of us, in the words of David: "Cast me not away from Thy face," but grant that during life fulfilling Thy law, I may see Thy face with a living faith,—on the day of judgment to behold it with exceeding joy; and after judgment, to see and enjoy it forever in glory. Amen.

O. S. B.

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## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

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### WHAT INDUCED GOD TO PRESERVE MARY FROM THE STAIN OF ORIGINAL SIN IN HER CONCEPTION.

*"Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is no spot in thee."*—Cant., iv.: 7.

In the Old Testament God once gave utterance to a very strange expression. It is the sentence I have chosen for my text: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is no spot in thee." Who is that friend of the Holy Ghost, whose soul is so fair that it is not defiled with the least spot? All men who come into this world, are contaminated with sin, though their life should last but an hour. "For behold," says the royal Prophet, "I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me," (*Ps.*, 1: 7), that is, all men are born under the ban of original sin, or in the disgrace of God, children of wrath. Who then is that immaculate friend of the Holy Ghost? It is no other than the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. She, alone, is exempt from the universal sinfulness, from the universal malediction pronounced upon mankind; she alone, from the very first instant of her existence, enjoyed the approving complacency of the Holy Ghost and of the Most Holy Trinity. For this reason, the Catholic Church has taught at all times that Mary was conceived without sin; and in our own days has solemnly raised to an article of faith, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But the Blessed Virgin Mary has not been favored with the grace of the Immaculate Conception through any merit of her own, but only through the infinite mercy of her divine Son. He

would apply to her the merits of His obedience and sacrifice on the cross at the very moment of her conception, as He applies to us the same merits after our birth, therefore, through His most sacred blood, the same blood which cleanses us in Baptism, He preserved her immaculate from the very first moment of her conception. But why did Jesus work this miracle only in favor of Mary? What induced Him to do so? I answer

*I. The honor of His Mother,*

*II. His own honor.*

I. By her Immaculate Conception the Son of God honored His Mother in a truly divine, that is, in an infinite manner, for He thereby conferred on her

1. *The highest gift of heaven,*

2. *The highest prerogative before all men,*

3. *The closest and most perfect similarity to Himself.*

1. There are various gifts of heaven, but there is only *one* which imparts to the immortal soul of man a true value in the eyes of God, viz.: Charity, or sanctifying grace. Hear what St Paul thinks about it. He writes: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, . . . and if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing."—*Cor.*, xiii: 1, 2. According to these words of St Paul, the most splendid gifts of heaven, such as the gift of tongues and of knowledge, the gift of prophecy and of faith, are unprofitable things, yea, as mere nothings, compared with charity. When God gives to a soul His love, or what amounts to the same, sanctifying grace, He gives her something more precious and valuable than all the other gifts of heaven taken together. And just this gift of sanctifying grace, a gift above every other gift, and above which no higher can be imagined, was bestowed upon Mary by the Immaculate Conception. And this grace was imparted to her in the highest possible degree, so that the Archangel Gabriel could say with perfect justice: "Hail, full of grace." Thus Jesus honored His Mother in a truly divine manner, when He imparted to her, at her very conception, the highest gift in the power of heaven to bestow,—viz.: The plenitude of grace.

2. By the Immaculate Conception, the Son of God imparted to the Blessed Virgin also *the highest prerogative before all men*. As Mary stands unique in her wonderful dignity as Mother of God, so that of her, alone, can be said: "*Blessed art thou amongst women*," so also a privilege, unique in its kind, was to be given to her, a privilege with which

no other mortal had ever been or ever shall be favored: *A total freedom from every sin and a permanent state of sanctifying grace.* We read, indeed, of certain Saints, out of whose souls the Lord blotted original sin and thus sanctified them before their birth. In the Old Law we read of Jeremias, the great prophet: "Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, *I sanctified thee.*—*Jer.*, i.: 5. And in the New Law we read of John, the Baptist: "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb," (*Luke*, i.: 15.); and it is the pious belief of the Church that this was the case with the virginal bridegroom of Mary—St. Joseph. But we know of no saint who was *conceived* without the taint of this evil. This privilege was reserved to Mary alone; she, alone was not purified *after* conception like the holy Saints mentioned; she was pure at all times; original sin dared not approach her immaculate soul even for a moment; and by reason of this privilege, she was exalted above all others, even the most highly favored Saints of God.

One might ask, why was Mary by the Immaculate Conception so significantly distinguished above all others? I think the reason is plain. If Mary before her coming into the world could have been asked what boon she most desired,—what treasure, do you think, could alone have satisfied the cravings of that virginal heart? Surely not riches, nor pleasures, nor honors, not even to become the Mother of God. One grace alone could the Lily of Israel desire, and that,—the grace of a perfect freedom from every sin, the permanent grace of the love of God, or in other words, the grace of the Immaculate Conception. And this is the more certain, since such a privilege was not in the least contrary to her humility, being hidden, as it was, from the world, and only known to heaven. Now the Omniscient Son of God foreknew the wish of His holy Mother, and as the best of all sons it pleased Him to grant it before she could express it, in order thus to honor His Mother even before her birth.

3. Finally, *the Immaculate Conception imparted to the Blessed Virgin the most perfect similarity to Jesus Christ.* If we compare the lives of Jesus and Mary with each other we find, as a rule, the most striking resemblance between the Divine Son and His Virgin Mother. Mary was like to Jesus in *her exterior life*; she was the only child of holy Anne, as Jesus was the only child of Mary; like Jesus, she came into this world, poor; and she remained poor all her life; at an early age she sought the house of God and spent in it her happiest hours, so did Jesus; like Him, she spent her entire youth in a hidden life and in retirement from the world; like Him, also, she endured many tribulations, and was little esteemed by the world; and finally, like Jesus, she died, was buried, but, like Him, was not suffered to see corruption. But there

was a still greater similarity between them in their inner life. She could say with Jesus: "I am meek and humble of heart." She could have asked with Jesus: "Which of you shall convince me of sin?" She could have asserted with Him: "My food is to do the will of my Father." But most wonderful of all are the close similarity and agreement between the God-Man and His Immaculate Mother, as manifested in their sacrifice for the redemption of the world. When the Son of God *in heaven* resolved to make this sacrifice, He said: "Behold, O Father, I come to do Thy holy will," *Mary on earth consented to it*, and said: "Be it done to me according to Thy word." When Jesus was solemnly presented in the temple as the victim for the salvation of the world, Mary received her share of the significant oblation, for from that moment her soul was pierced, and remained pierced for thirty-three years, with the sword of sorrow predicted by the venerable Simeon. And finally, when Jesus completed His sacrifice on the cross, Mary was not missing from the agonizing scene; heroically she stood beneath the cross, and voluntarily offered herself and her adorable Son to the Divine justice as an atonement for the sins of the world.

Behold how the Mother in all things resembles her divine Son. And yet, all this similarity would have been very imperfect and insufficient, nay the most beautiful and the most essential similarity of all would have been wanting to her, without the crowning glory of her Conception. The harmonious correspondence we have described as existing between Jesus and Mary refers more to their relations in life, or to certain internal or external actions and states. But by being exempt from the stain of original sin, and by always living, as Jesus did, in the state of sanctifying grace, the soul of Mary became the most perfect copy of the human soul of Christ.

And what was the consequence of this? The consequence was that Mary's soul possessed a beauty surpassing all comprehension; such a beauty that the heavenly Father could exclaim: "This is My beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased;" such a beauty that the Holy Ghost, acknowledging her as His bride, worthy of Himself, could assert: "Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is no spot in thee." Such a beauty that all the choirs of the Angels in an ecstasy of delight cry out: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (*Cant.*, vi.: 9), such a beauty, that St. Bernardine did not hesitate to say: "We should have a representation of the beauty of God Himself, if we could represent to ourselves the beauty of Mary's soul."—Thus, then, the truth enunciated above must be evident to all, that the Son of God has immensely honored His Mother by the prerogative of the Immaculate Conception. But by honoring His Mother *He honored Himself*.

II. The Son of God for the sake of His own honor distinguished the Blessed Virgin by the Immaculate Conception, that we might the better know

1. *The perfection of His love,*
2. *The perfection of His wisdom,*
3. *The perfection of His sanctity.*

1. Every good child appears to love its parents; but the true love of a good child manifests itself in the honor which it gives to its parents. *Where there is no honor, there is no rational love*, but only animal, carnal devotedness. The more parents are honored by their children, the more affectionately and sincerely they are loved. Hence the fourth Commandment does not say: "*Love thy father and thy mother;*" but: "*Honor thy father and thy mother.*" Now, if the Son of God had not honored His mother in every possible manner, what should we think of Him? If a son would not protect his mother from disgrace, although in his power to do so: if when able, he would not do all he could to preserve her in stainless purity, would we not think that the love of such a son for his mother was, at least, not a perfect love? And, humanly speaking, yet with deepest fear and reverence, we would be inclined to think the same of Jesus, if He had not protected His Blessed Mother from shame and disgrace. And *what in the world is a greater shame and disgrace than sin?* Now if the Son of God had not favored His Mother with the grace of the Immaculate Conception, He would really have left her for some time in sin, that is, in shame and disgrace. And her disgrace would in a certain measure redound to His dishonor—and why? Because in His omnipotence it would have been easy for Him to keep the taint of sin away from her at all times; and, hence, her disgrace would surely weaken our belief in the perfection, of His love. But if we could doubt, even for an instant, whether He honored His mother as highly as He, the Eternal God, was able to honor her; if we could doubt, even for an instant, whether He fulfilled the duty of filial love in its entire and highest perfection, this doubt would be derogatory to His own divine honor. This had to be prevented; *for the Lord is jealous of His honor.* The whole world was to know, that herein, too, He gave the most beautiful example of filial devotion; and that His love for His mother was in truth an infinitely perfect one. And for this reason, He protected her from the disgrace of original sin, and placed her, from the first instant of her creation, by her Immaculate Conception, in that happy state of sanctifying grace. Thus, by manifesting His love for her, He honored Himself.

2. But love was not the only motive of the Son of God for this distinction paid to His Blessed Mother. The divine wisdom also induced

Him to effect her Immaculate Conception. Because He had chosen the Blessed Virgin for His Mother, and by this dignity had placed her above all creatures in heaven and upon earth, it was, as it seems to us, only in correspondence with His wisdom, that *in heavenly gifts and graces He should not place her lower than any other creature*. Could we call it wisdom, if He had favored lower creatures with gifts higher than those of His highest creature—Mary? Now, we know that the Angels as well as our first parents, Adam and Eve, came into existence free from every stain of sin. If, therefore, Mary had not been conceived immaculate, she would have been created less pure than the Angels; that is, the Queen of Angels would be less pure than her subjects in heaven, the Mother of God less pure than the servants of God. Could we call this wisdom? Let us go farther. Without the Immaculate Conception, Mary would have been created even less pure than our first parents. Eve, the mother of all sinners, created in justice,—Mary, the mother of all the just, conceived in injustice! Who could believe this? Eve, who brought sin, death, and all misery into the world, more highly favored than she through whom life, and salvation, and happiness have come to us! O how hard it would be for us to discover herein the work of divine wisdom! Where and when has it ever been known that an earthly queen had less honor than her subjects? The mother of a household less privileges than her children? The belief in the perfect wisdom of the Son of God should not become a stumbling-block for us, should not be disturbed by the least breath of doubt; this is what His honor demands. Therefore, He created His Mother in greater purity than that of our first parents, in greater purity than even the most sublime spirits of heaven; therefore, He enriched her with the grace and glory of the Immaculate Conception. Thus, by manifesting His wisdom He honored Himself.

3. But, more than all, His perfect sanctity seems to have induced the Son of God to grant His blessed Mother this distinction. God, being infinitely holy, hates all sin, with an eternal inextinguishable hatred. Whosoever is contaminated with sin, is an object of the divine displeasure and horror, yes, an object of the divine anger and malediction, as we read in the Book of Wisdom: "*To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*"—*Wisd.*, xiv. 9. Now let us suppose that Mary had been contaminated with original sin, even though it were but for a short time, what would have been the inevitable result? The Son of God would have looked upon her as a sinner *with displeasure*; He would have turned away from her with horror. Nor is this all. The wrath of God,—the curse of God would have rested on her as a sinner; and enmity, would have existed between them. Moreover, Mary as a sinner would have been in the power and servitude of the devil; he would, in a manner, have crushed her head before she had fulfilled her prophetic destiny: "*She shall crush the serpent's head.*" He should have possessed her before

God possessed her, although it is said of her that God possessed her from the beginning of His days. Tell me, could we connect such a thought as this with the sanctity of God? Could we rationally believe that a person, who first stood in a hostile relation towards God, a person who was first hated and detested by God, a person who was first a slave of the devil and the property of hell, that such a person had afterwards been chosen as the Mother of the all-holy God? Oh, how difficult would it be for us in this case to believe that God really hates sin as terribly as we are assured He does, in many passages of the Sacred Scriptures! But this belief in the perfect sanctity of God was intended to penetrate us most powerfully and vividly, and, therefore, God would give us in the Immaculate Conception *the strongest proof of His horror of every sin*; and, therefore, was pleased to crown His mother with the most consummate holiness from the very first instant of her Conception. Thus, by manifesting His sanctity to men, He honored Himself.

By the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, God, the Lord, assuredly honored Himself, for thereby He glorified His love, His wisdom and His sanctity. At the same time, He honored His Mother, for thereby He imparted to her the highest gift of heaven, the greatest privilege before all men, and the most perfect similarity to Himself. *And for this unspeakable grace Mary was thankful to Him with all the fervor and affection of her soul* during the whole course of her life. God made us proportionally as happy by baptism as Mary, by the Immaculate Conception, therefore we should be thankful as Mary was, all the days of our life. Yes, let us often thank God for this great blessing of Christian Baptism; let us thank Him that with Baptism we have been incorporated with the Catholic Church, the holy Roman and Apostolic Church in which we have the true Faith, the true saving Sacraments and the holy and most august Sacrifice of the Mass. In short, let us thank and praise and bless Him that as Catholics we can enter with Jesus even into such intimate relations as those which existed between Him and His holy Mother. O if we would often with joy and sincerity give expression to our gratitude for this honorable grace, heaven's choicest gifts would flow upon us in a more abundant measure. No heart loves God more, no prayer pleases God more, than the heart and the prayer of the grateful Christian.

Mary manifested her gratitude for her Immaculate Conception by her immaculate conduct all the days of her earthly pilgrimage,—by never contracting the smallest stain of even venial sin. But in order to preserve herself in her sinlessness, do you know what means were made use of by this holiest and purest of souls? First, she prayed again and again for strength against every temptation which Satan or the world could prepare for her; secondly, she lived in continual retirement from the world and all occasions of sin, as far as it depended

on her own will; and thirdly, she repeated a thousand times her protest before God that she would rather dwell in hell without sin, than reign—if it were possible—in heaven with sin.

*In our stainless conduct ought also to consist the chief proof of our gratitude.* Baptism has made us free from sin; therefore, from a motive of gratitude we should hate sin, and sin alone, with an undying hatred all the days of our life. Baptism has imparted to us the grace of God; therefore, through gratitude we should be prepared to sacrifice life itself, even to the most cruel form of death, rather than to lose God's grace by sin. But if we would live holy and sinless lives, we must constantly employ the weapons made use of by our holy and sinless Mother. We must not only pray with Mary, but, like Mary, avoid all sinful occasions which may present themselves from time to time. If we thus imitate Mary during life, God's approving smile will always rest upon us; and if we live as the friends of God, we shall undoubtedly die in His favor. Fair and without spot, at that dread hour, our souls will appear at the judgment-seat of the Son of the Immaculate Virgin, and then we shall hear with rapture this consoling sentence from His Divine lips: "Enter into the joy of the Lord." Amen.

O.S.B.

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## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

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*"Hail, full of grace."—Luke, 1: 28.*

We firmly believe, that God never suffered the Blessed Virgin Mary to be defiled by original sin. If God chose to protect her against the universal curse of mankind, what was to hinder Him? Who would deny this power to God? With God no word is impossible. Is a law-giver not master of his laws, and can he not exempt from them whom he pleases? And if God can sanctify and justify a soul after it has fallen into sin, why not before it is defiled by sin, at the very first instant of its conception, creation, and existence? It being certain beyond doubt that God had this power, the only question that might be asked, is: Was God willing to save the Blessed Virgin Mary from original sin? Does our reason suggest arguments by which we are induced to suppose this willingness? I will give you the answer to these questions by showing you why we should naturally expect that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost would guard the Blessed Virgin Mary against original sin.

I. 1. It was to be expected that *God the Father* would make this ex-

ception in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of the high dignity and position for which He had destined her. Mary was His daughter, and His first-born daughter of grace, wherefore she could never be the slave of sin. "I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first-born before all creatures."—*Eccl.*, xxiv.: 5. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning."—*Prov.*, viii.: 22. She is the one and only daughter of Life, in contradistinction to all the rest who are daughters of Death, because they are born in sin.

Mary was destined by God to be the mediatrix between God and man. She was born to co-operate in the salvation of mankind. Therefore it was absolutely necessary, that she should not appear as a sinner and an enemy of God, or as guilty of the very same offence which required expiation, but that, as a friend of the Lord, she should be preserved from all sin by a special act of divine Providence. How can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? Mary was to be free from original sin, if she was to co-operate in the redemption of mankind. She was to crush the serpent's head, which, by seducing our first parents, had caused the death of all mankind. Therefore, God must have taken care that she should remain exempt from all servitude of the devil, that is, from all sin. A medicine which prevents sickness is certainly much better than the medicine which cures sickness. The merits of Christ were for the Blessed Virgin Mary a medicine, as it were, to prevent and preserve her from being infected by the universal sickness of mankind, original sin; while those same merits are a medicine, as it were, to cure us of this sickness when applied to our souls in the Sacrament of Baptism. Almighty God may save man in any way He likes. He is not bound to save this or that soul, in this or that particular manner or way. In *us*, the blood of Christ is a cleansing grace, in Mary, it was a preventing grace. God preserved her from ever being defiled by sin because He had chosen her to be the Mother of His Son, whom He wished to be born of a virgin who was sinless, pure, holy, from the first moment of her Conception. If Mary was the strong woman who came into the world to conquer the devil, it is irrational to suppose that the devil should have been permitted first to have dominion over her, and to make her his slave. Mary was chosen by the Father to be the Mother of His only begotten Son, and, as all things ordained for God's service ought to be without sin, so God must have sanctified and preserved her from every sin that she might become a worthy tabernacle for His Son. We cannot suppose God to have done less for Mary than He had done for Eve whom He enriched with sanctifying grace from the first instant of her existence. "The Holy One who shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

2. This is what natural reason would lead us to expect of the Son of God, for the sake of His own and His Mother's honor. As the Almighty Son of God could choose for His Mother whom He pleased, He certainly chose one who would be no disgrace to Him, that is, who was without sin. It is contrary to reason to suppose that the immaculate God-Man could take flesh and blood from a mother defiled with sin. It cannot be supposed that the Son of God would have been born of a virgin contaminated with original sin. Jesus would not suffer that His mother's body should see corruption after death. How much more reason had He to preserve her soul from the corruption of sin which would have been a greater dishonor to Him! "He hath set His tabernacle in the sun." It is expected of any son, that he should protect his mother from sin, how could we suppose that the Son of God would not have done the same? He who commanded us to honor father and mother, after He had become Man would not omit to fulfill this commandment Himself, in the Bosom of his Father; wherefore, He granted His mother all possible grace and honor. We all believe that Mary, assisted by special grace, never committed a venial sin, and we would shrink with horror from the contrary thought. But if she, having been stained by one venial sin (by which, however the grace of God is not lost), would have been unworthy of being the mother of God, how far less would she have been worthy, had she ever been under the curse of original sin, by which the grace of God is lost!

3. Mary was selected by the Holy Ghost to be His bride. "My sister, My bride is a garden enclosed."—*Cant.*, iv.: 12. We shudder at the supposition that this privileged Virgin, before she became the bride of God could have been inhabited by the unclean spirit; that the devil should have dwelt in this heart before it was made the sanctuary of the divine Spirit. "I to My beloved, and My beloved to Me who feedeth among lilies."—*Cant.* x.: 2. "Mary alone deserved the grace of being called mother and bride."—*St. Aug.* The Holy Ghost descended into Mary personally and after having enriched her with more graces than all other creatures, He reposed in her and made His bride Queen of heaven and earth. Therefore the grace of the same holy Spirit has sanctified both the body and the soul of Mary so as to make her worthy to clothe the Eternal Word with her flesh. Mary could not have been called "full of grace" by the Archangel unless she had surpassed all by the richness of her graces. Therefore, she must have been adorned with the original justice and innocence possessed by Adam and Eve and by the Angels before their fall; consequently, she must have been enriched with the fullness of divine grace in her mother's womb, and enjoyed an exemption from original sin, or, in other words, was immaculate in her conception.

II. God could preserve the Blessed Virgin Mary from original sin; it was becoming that He should preserve her from it, and therefore, He would, and actually did, preserve her from sin. This is the strongest argument for the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. God could preserve her from the universal curse of mankind, viz.: Original sin. What was to hinder Him from so doing? Is He not almighty? Can He not do as He pleases? Is anything impossible for Him? No one denies that God can sanctify and justify a soul after she has fallen into sin, why should He not be able to preserve a soul from falling into sin, from being defiled by original sin? It was becoming that the Blessed Virgin Mary should be exempt from original sin. God would not, and could not permit the temple in which He chose to dwell, to be defiled by the least blemish. The honor of the Son required that His Mother should not be the slave of the devil even for a moment. God so hates and abhors sin that His divine Son would not have assumed human nature, if He could not have received it from an immaculate Mother. Therefore, God would, and actually did, confer sinlessness upon her. "He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name; from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Now let us make the application to our own actual condition. We, the children of the Church, can live in the state of grace, free from mortal sin. This we can do, not indeed of ourselves, but with the grace of God; for, like the Apostle, we can do all things in Him who strengthens us. God requires us to live without sin, and He commands no impossibility; if it were impossible, He would not have imposed upon us such a command. We must, therefore do what we are able, and pray for what we are not able. God does not suffer us to be tempted above our strength. What is to hinder us from leading a virtuous life? It was not in our power to be exempt from Adam's sin, but after having been cleansed from original sin and adorned with sanctifying grace, it is our stern duty to lead a pure, sinless life. This duty is imposed upon us for the following reasons. By the baptism of water and the Holy Ghost we are born again and cleansed from every stain of sin. By the baptism of penance we are cleansed again if necessary from actual sins; and we are exhorted by the Holy Ghost to lead a sinless life.

In order to guard man from sin, that Divine Spirit sends remorse of conscience to the sinner. And this remorse is intended to convert the greatest sinner. Cain was not forthwith killed for the murder of his brother, but was given opportunity to be moved to repentance by finding no rest upon the earth. Joseph's brethren were truly converted by the afflictions caused by their own guilt. David had no peace for his bones because of his sins. Even Judas was visited with stings of conscience before he laid desperate hands upon his own life, In order to

guard the just from sin and to recompense them for their sufferings and sacrifices, the Holy Spirit sends them peace and consolation that surpass all understanding. Thus He recompensed St. Paul for his many sufferings; and therefore, he says of himself; "I am filled with comfort, and I exceedingly abound with joy in all my tribulations."

It is becoming that Christians should live without sin, for holy Mother Church ought to have holy children, and, therefore, we should honor her by leading a sinless life. The Apostle says: "To will good is present to me, but to accomplish that which is good, I find not," therefore, ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find.

You are convinced of your strict duty to walk before God in purity. Remember, dear brethren, the command of holy Mother Church at your Baptism to carry the garment of Innocence unspotted before the tribunal of God: "Receive this white garment, and see thou carry it without stain before the judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have eternal life." Remember the injunctions of your God: "Wash yourselves, be clean take away the evil of your desires from My eyes, cease to do perversely." Remember, in fine, that nothing defiled can enter into heaven, and act accordingly. Thus you will venerate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a right and profitable manner. Amen.

ACCORDING TO SS. ALPHONSUS AND ANSELM.

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## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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### HUMAN RESPECT.

*"What went you out into the desert to see? a reed shaken with the wind?"*  
Math., xi.: 7.

John the Baptist was in prison, as the Gospel of this day tells us, and sending two of his disciples to the divine Master, he instructed them to say to Him: "Art thou He that is to come, or look we for another?" John did not ask Jesus this question (through his disciples) because he doubted that Christ was the true Messias, but he did it only for the sake of his disciples, who yet needed assurance that Jesus was really the Messias promised and sent by God. Hence, he sent two of his followers to Jesus that He Himself might inform them of His dignity as the anointed Saviour of the world. John was in prison, and could no longer personally teach his disciples and convince them of the divinity of Jesus. But what had brought this great man into prison? His love of truth,

which he preached on all occasions, not only to the common people but also to the great ones of the world. King Herod had heard much of the holy Precursor's wisdom, he therefore invited him to his court, in order to consult him on certain important affairs. But although the king hearkened to him on some points, in the main he did not follow the Baptist's advice but requited his frankness with imprisonment, a punishment as severe as it was unjust. Herod lived in incestuous wedlock with the wife of his brother, and heeded not the admonition of John, who often said to him with holy zeal: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Nay, these earnest words so incensed the king that he gave orders to cast the holy, truth-loving man into a dungeon. It would have been an easy matter for John, even then, to effect his release from prison and to attain to high honors, if he could only have brought himself to keep silence and sanction the adultery of the king. But John was not a man who feared men, or who dissembled the truth through human respect, and sanctioned vices. He was not so inconstant and wavering, as at one time to say a certain act was wrong, and at another time to say it was right, just as the world wished him to say; he was not like a reed, shaken with the wind,—he was a man of intrepid constancy, fearing God more than men. We should act in like manner, and never permit human respect, or human fear to deter us from the practice of virtue and truth. But such is not the case with the great mass of mankind: they often fear men more than God. One often hears this saying: "What will the world, what will people say?" But you seldom hear: "What will God say if I do, or omit, this?" This human respect is entirely unworthy of a Christian; it is a mean and, at the same time, a most dangerous thing. That you may the better understand it, I shall speak to-day

*I. On the meanness,*

*II. On the injurious effects of human respect.*

I. A sinful human respect is that low-spirited, detestable sentiment, by virtue of which a Christian acts not according to his conscience, but does some evil or omits some good in order to please his fellow-men. Now, there can be no doubt that it is very mean for any one to neglect his duties to please men, or to commit sin in order to gain their praise, and consequently human respect must be something very mean and detestable.

i. Human respect makes its votaries real slaves of those whom they desire to please; they renounce *their reason*, *their liberty*, and *their conscience* in order not to disoblige the world. They renounce *their reason*, because not daring to think, to judge, and to speak as it prescribes, they

think, judge, and speak as the world thinks, judges and speaks. Secondly, they renounce *their liberty* because not having the courage to practise the known good, they rather omit it, in order not to disoblige the world; and finally they renounce *their conscience* by committing the evil which they abhor and detest in their hearts, because others also commit it; and knowing their duties, they do not discharge them, because similar duties are not discharged by others. How disgraceful is such a sentiment for a Christian! how markedly in contradiction to the admonition of our divine Redeemer, who says: "Fear not those that kill the body, and cannot kill the soul; but rather fear Him that can destroy both body and soul in hell!" (*Math.*, x: 28) And yet these timid Christians set so much value on the opinion of the world that they sacrifice to it the three most precious spiritual goods: Reason, Liberty, and Conscience. As the world thinks, judges and speaks, they think, judge and speak; what the world praises, they praise; what the world censures, they censure, though their reason and conscience declare otherwise.

2. This fear of displeasing the world, or this desire to gain its good-will and applause, not seldom induces men *entirely to deny those duties which the Christian is bound to fulfill towards God and the neighbor*. Many would be ready to discharge their duties, if they would not on that account be mocked or censured by the world, or if they did not fear by so doing to incur the ill-will of a man to whom they are under special obligations. The thought: What will the world, what will this or that one say, if I do according to my duty and conscience?—this thought terrifies them and induces them to neglect what they are bound by divine precept to do. Thus many Christians would have plenty of time and opportunity to hear the word of God more frequently, to assist at Mass, to receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist,—but they fear the criticism or censure of the world. What will the world say? they think; and from a cowardly human respect they neglect their duties.—Many careless Catholics have often made the resolution to be converted, never to go into that house, never to frequent that society, never to visit that person,—but they fear the scoffs and the railleries of others, they dread some temporal disadvantage, if they change their lives; and therefore, they continue their old way of living, because they do not wish to disoblige the world.—Many others are overwhelmed by God with abundant blessings and benefits; in all that they undertake the approval of heaven is visible, everything succeeds and prospers with them. But if an opportunity offers itself to return thanks publicly to God, to show themselves openly as faithful servants of God, they are ashamed to manifest their gratitude, because they fear men,—Others, in societies where religion, spiritual and temporal authorities, and the honor of the neighbor are drawn into the mire by too free

discourses, could speak a good word, and refute those scandalous calumnies and blasphemies, but they fear the world; and because they do not wish to draw down its displeasure upon their own heads, they either remain criminally silent, or coincide against their convictions in all the evil that is said.—Thus, too often, human respect causes us to forget those duties which we are bound to practise towards God. We know our duty, we resolve to discharge it,—but we have not the courage to do so in the face of public opinion. But is not such human respect a real denial of the love of God? Do you call this loving God above all? If, at the time of the cruel persecutions of the Christians, those unhappy men were severely punished who, though adoring the true God in their heart, in order to escape cruel tortures, denied their faith only externally, what punishment do those Christians deserve, who, not on account of a cruel torture, but out of a disgraceful human fear and a mean desire to please creatures, deny their faith in the Creator? Those despicable cowards need neither fire nor sword to deter them from the discharge of their duties towards God, since a word of ridicule or mockery, a significant shrugging of the shoulders, or a dissatisfied countenance can dissuade them from doing as their conscience dictates. The timid worldling says: "Thou knowest, O God, how unmercifully the world persecutes all those who forsake its standard and go over to Thy camp, but nevertheless since I have to live in the world, how can I disoblige it? My state and my circumstances bind me to it, and do not permit me to live as piously, devoutly, and virtuously as I might wish to live, nay I find myself sometimes under the necessity of denying Thee, O God, in word and deed, in order to keep up my respectability with the world, and retain its goodwill. But what can I do?" This is the common logic of the world; thus thinks and speaks the worldling. But St Chrysostom answers to this: Do you know what these discourses mean? They are tantamount to saying to God: "Curse me, O Lord, for all I care, if only the world gives me its applause; I prefer to be the object of Thy hatred and contempt for all eternity, rather than fail to enjoy here upon earth the praise and honor of men." Who is not terrified at this interpretation of the disgraceful sentiments of those whom human respect deters from the discharge of their duties towards God?

But human respect is also the frequent cause of Christians neglecting their most sacred duties towards the neighbor. How often does not human respect cause superiors to overlook the faults of their inferiors, and fail to punish them? How often does it not induce fathers of families to keep silence at the scandalous conduct of some of their household? How often does it not hinder parents from giving a Christian education to their children, because in our time it is looked upon as something superfluous, as something of no value in the eyes of the world? Human respect causes the rich and those in high station

to give bad examples of piety to their fellow-men. Human respect deters the criminal spendthrift from curtailing his expenses and giving up his debauched life, because he fears the talk and judgment of the world. Human respect closes the mouths of many listeners, when the honor of the neighbor is assailed by bad tongues, because by defending the absent they fear to be regarded as the friends of the innocently-oppressed, the unjustly-calumniated. And thus the dread of displeasing men, and the desire of the world's esteem lead to injustices so many and so grievous that their number would be difficult to reckon. Who does not perceive that such a disposition of the mind is most disgraceful and detestable? Who would ever willingly give his applause to a man whose thoughts are in direct contradiction to his words and acts?

3. Moreover, if we consider that human respect *often requires greater sacrifices of its victim than a Christian would have to make in order to please God*, we shall understand better the thorough meanness of that cowardly passion. Many worldlings find it irksome to assist at a somewhat long religious ceremony, to devote a few hours of the night to prayer and meditation, or to spend a brief portion of the day in spiritual reading; but, on the contrary, they do not confess that it is burdensome to spend entire nights in amusements, to give hours to play, or to entertain themselves, day after day, in the society of others; for the world demands it, and what would the world say if one would not yield to its demands? Many lukewarm Catholics look upon the precept of fasting during Lent as a very hard one; they frame a thousand excuses, in order to escape it, they will not endure one hour of hunger and thirst for the love of God; but if the world demands a similar self-denial, they submit to it without contradiction; they endure hunger and thirst, heat and cold, if they can only hope thereby to be praised by the world, or, at least, not to forfeit its esteem. The same may be said of the duty of giving alms. We know very well that Christianity imposes upon us the duty of giving alms, to help our needy fellow-men according to our ability; but when it comes to the point of really proving our charity,—how many withdraw themselves! They have no money for the support of the poor, of the church, of the school, of other charitable institutions; every one at that decisive moment is poor. But if the world demands *its* tribute of gold and silver, do they hesitate a moment to contribute their share to those overflowing coffers? Ah! no, with the greatest liberality they dispense the treasure which they refused to the cause of charity and religion. And why? In order to be respected by the world, to be praised and honored for their generosity; or, at least, not to be despised and ridiculed by their dreaded censors. But is such a sentiment honorable? Can a Christian hope thereby to please God? Certainly not; on the contrary our Divine Lord says that He will deny before His Angels on

the day of judgment those who now deny Him before men; that He will refuse there to recognize as His servants those who now refuse to recognize Him as their Master. But enough of the meanness of human respect, let us now consider its injurious effects.

II. He who thinks that the fear of displeasing the world or the desire of pleasing it will gain for him before men true honor and reputation, cannot but be greatly deceived; on the contrary the victim of human respect, *instead of being honored by the world, will be ridiculed and despised by it.* For how much soever the world desires to be flattered, it despises those who flatter it. What, for instance, would the world have said, if John the Baptist instead of telling Herod the truth, had flattered and praised him, had sanctioned his adultery, and passed over his sinful life in silence? Would it not have branded him as a traitor to the truth? Would it not have represented him as a man who valued the favor of the king more than the approbation of God, and who shamefully neglected his duty in order not draw down the displeasure of a prince upon himself? How does the world even now judge of those who by all possible means try to please it? What does it say of those who by princely attire and immoderate expenses endeavor to attract its empty admiration? Are not those very persons the object of its *railleries and contempt?* Or, what does the world think and say of those who with cringing and selfish cowardice try to please every one and to displease none; who praise everything that others praise, even though it be evil, and who reprehend what others reprehend, even though it be good? Will they obtain the desired reputation with the world? By no means. On the contrary, the world will condemn and brand such conduct as flattery and folly. What name does the world give to those who continually have God on the tongue and the devil in the heart,—who desire at the same to serve God and Mammon, who run themselves out of breath in order to be present at every church-service, in order to please God, but at the same time indulge in every amusement and follow every fashion in order to please the world? Will the world praise and applaud them? No, on the contrary, it will deride them as hypocrites and Pharisees. The world, though ever so wicked and corrupt in itself, is never favorable to those who allow themselves to be shaken to and fro like reeds before the wind. Nay, more, it is the first to meet with contempt those who most ardently desire to please it. Inconsistent though it be in its very wickedness, the world demands blameless priests, just authorities, faithful husbands and wives, modest and bashful virgins, temperate men, and truly pious souls. It cannot tolerate any votary who neglects his duties for the sake of pleasing it, but on the contrary, it will always, though against its will, reserve its esteem and honor for those alone who constantly and consistently walk in the straight way of truth and virtue.

2. Every one who strives to please the world becomes contemptible and ridiculous not only in its sight but, no less so, in his own eyes. If the miserable victim of human respect ever returns into himself to ponder his hapless condition; if he considers how many hours of his life he has uselessly sacrificed to the vanities of the world; how many idle words he has spoken for the love of the world; how many useless expenses he incurred at the foolish demand of the world, and how often he has made the most strenuous efforts only to please the world, what answer will his conscience make? Can it praise him that he in so shameful a manner has disregarded God, and given the preference to the world? Will his conscience accept the vain excuse that in order to live in the world, one must live with the world? Will it be able to console him when he reflects that from human respect he has so often denied and suppressed the truth and defended falsehood; that he has flattered vice, forsaken his faith, acted contrary to fraternal charity, and violated his holiest duties? No, his own conscience will condemn him as a man who only served the world. O, if he had devoted himself as zealously to the service of God as to the service of the world, if he had offered to God the sacrifices which he offered to the world, if he had sought as earnestly to please God as he sought to please the world, if he had feared God as much as he had feared the world, how quiet and peaceful a conscience would he not enjoy! With what comfort he could now look up to God who with pleasure looks down upon those who love virtue and truth! What reward might he not hope for, if in the exercise of his duties he had sought the approbation of God, and had not striven for the praise and the applause of the world, or feared its vituperation! Thus the timid time-server, the double-tongued flatterer goes about among men, an object of disgust and contempt to himself and others. His conscience tortures him, he is abandoned by God, whom he never properly loved or served; and he is overwhelmed with shame and confusion by the world, which never really esteemed him, because it never discovered in him anything worthy of its esteem.

3. Ridiculous before men, dear friends, contemptible in his own eyes is he whom cowardly human respect has made a slave to the world. But the measure of his sin and folly is not yet filled. He is also odious and detestable before God, and this is the worst of all, the greatest evil that can arise from sinful human respect. St Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all impiety and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice.... Because that, when they had known God, they have not glorified Him as God, nor gave thanks: but became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened: for professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.—*Rom.*, i.: 18, *seq.* Who are those who know God, but do not glorify Him, nor give thanks? They are those Christians, who know the

truth, but detain and suppress it from human respect; who are ashamed of their religion and their faith; who did not give God His due honor. They indeed enjoy the benefits of God, but from the fear of the world they do not dare to show their gratitude; they have become fools by participating in and loving the follies of the world; "and against these," says St Paul, "the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven." Jesus says: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, I shall also confess him before My Father, who is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father, who is in heaven."—*Math.*, x.: 32, 33. These words of our Redeemer are plain. To every one who in this world confesses his faith in God, without shame, and practises it; to every one who remains courageously faithful to truth and virtue, though mockery and persecution await him; to every one who defends the honor of God,—our Blessed Lord Himself will be an advocate and a eulogist before His Father in heaven. But woe to those who in this world have denied the truth through cowardly human respect and, at the cost of faith and virtue, have flattered their fellow-men! Woe to those who through human fear did not dare to lead a pious, devout, and virtuous life, who only lived as wicked worldlings and not as the divine law and their conscience prescribed! woe to those who in life are ashamed of the poor, meek, humble, and despised Jesus—He, too, will one day be ashamed of them, He, too, will deny them before His heavenly Father, as in this world they basely denied Him before men!

No one can serve two masters, he will hate the one, and love the other. You also, dear brethren, cannot serve two masters, you cannot be faithful to God and to the world at one and the same time. He that holds to God, cannot stand in the service of the world; he that holds to the world, cannot be a servant of God. There is no middle way; the heart must not be divided; the love of God and the love of the world cannot find room together in one human heart. That heart belongs either entirely to God, or entirely to the world. But woe to us if our hearts belong only to the world, for the world and the figure of the world pass away, and with it the unhappy mortal passes away who has attached himself to it. Only he who has in holy love consecrated his heart to God remains for ever; and exceedingly great shall be his reward in heaven.

Let us then, dear friends no longer be guided by vain human respect. Do right and fear no one. Love the truth and act according to the law of God and the voice of your conscience, and you need fear no man. Every Christian ought to have the disposition of St Paul, who says: "As to me, it is a thing of the least account to be judged by you, or by human judgment, but neither do I judge myself; . . . . He that judgeth me is the Lord." *I Cor. iv.*: 3, 4. What does it matter whether we are praised or reprendered by the world? If we are in the friendship of God, the world may think of us what it pleases. The world can neither eternally pun-

ish nor eternally reward us. God is our rewarder, and Him we must fear. If, therefore, we have an opportunity of doing a good work; or if we are earnestly resolved to begin a new and well-regulated life, we need not ask whether other people are pleased or displeased. Let us act according to virtue and truth, though thereby we should make all men our enemies; for the friendship of God must be dearer to us than the friendship of men. Amen.

O.S.B.

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## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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### HOMILY.

*“Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”—Luke, iii. 4.*

The anniversary of the Birth of our Saviour is drawing near. The Catholic Church, during these days of preparation for the great solemnity of Christmas, addresses to us these earnest and emphatic words: “Open the doors that the Lord of glory may enter.” “Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths.” Let us take the advice of the Church; let us converse and meditate, in these days, only on holy things; let us disengage ourselves from the affairs of the world and not be too much distracted by our customary employments. Let us lift up our eyes, hearts, and senses to heaven, whence that Saviour is to come, who has been promised to us as the One who is to crush the serpent’s head, and in whom all generations shall be blessed. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths;” this same voice, which echoed from the Baptist’s trumpet on the banks of the Jordan, converting many Jews, still sounds daily in our ears. Woe to us if we are deaf to that voice; well for us if, from the Gospel of this day, we learn to prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight His paths.

I. *“When John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to Him: Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?”* John in prison! Do you know the reason why he was cast into prison? Because he had spoken the truth. He had the courage to say to Herod: “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.”—*Matth.*, xiv. 4. He required of Herod to break the shameful chains which bound him to Herodias, the lawful wife of his brother Philip. But Herod was too much of a coward, his ears were open to flattery, he did not heed the prophet’s warning. What was the result?

John was apprehended, bound with chains and cast into prison. But the just man is free even in chains, whilst the wicked man who persecutes him, although he wallows in sensual pleasures, is not free, because he serves sin, and whosoever serves sin is a slave. John in prison! What are we to learn from this? Not to be rash in our judgments when we see one of our fellow-men sentenced to imprisonment. Do not condemn every prisoner as a bad man or an outcast of the world, for it often happens, that those in prison are not the worst of men. Those who denounce them, and who have been the cause of their sins and crimes, those who have misled and seduced them, are often far more guilty and despicable than their victims. Those whose lives are ended by the rope or the sword of human justice, are sometimes less dangerous to society than those spectators of their execution, whose conscience cries out to them: "Ye are guilty of the blood of these poor sinners!" The most dangerous of criminals, for whom the world has no prisons, are the seducers of innocence, who laugh with a devil's malice whilst their poor betrayed victims writhe in agony and are driven to despair; those cunning defaulters who know how to cover their iniquity with the shield of justice; those treacherous ones to whom no oath is sacred, not even that which they have taken before the altar of God in the Sacrament of Matrimony; those scoffers at holy things who rob man of his faith, his only consolation in this valley of tears; those tormentors, wicked, drunken husbands and fathers, who slowly, but surely, destroy the peace and happiness of their wives and children. Have we prisons for these criminals? No; therefore, never judge a man by his appearance, for appearances are deceitful. Jesus was apprehended and bound like a malefactor. Suspend your judgment. Give to every one the benefit of the doubt. God will judge. Leave the verdict to Him; but if you must judge, judge yourself, that God may not judge you. The head of the noble John is cut off whilst the wicked Herod triumphantly wields the sceptre. St. Paul in prison, and cruel Nero on the throne! Job on a dunghill, wicked Achab in a palace! What a contrast! The just in this world are judged by the unjust. How inscrutable are the ways of the Lord! Sir Thomas More, a man of integrity and godliness, (whose like England has not seen since he was forced to lay his head upon the block), sealed his convictions with his life-blood, while the sensual, blood-thirsty tyrant, Henry the Eighth, was revelling in the unhallowed delights of a royal palace. But God will judge. What a comfort to reflect that on the last day, not man, but God, will judge us!

II. *John in prison sent two of his disciples.* Thus we see that John had still some faithful friends, who had not abandoned him, though he was buried in a dungeon, and forsaken by the world. This is true, genuine friendship, not to desert a friend in adversity, but to cling to him

through evil, as well as through good, report. Alas! my friends, are you like the sun-dial which only shows the time while the sun shines? A true friend is known in the time of adversity. We have many to fawn on us whilst we are prosperous, whilst we keep open house, and invite them to sumptuous dinners; many to flatter us as long as we can lavish costly presents upon them;—but the moment we are reduced in circumstances, our former so-called friends will hardly know or recognize us. They will pass us by as strangers, and scarcely salute us. He that finds a true friend, has found a great treasure. Therefore, consider no one your friend, commit to no one the secrets of your heart, till you have found by experience that you can rely upon him. The friendship of the disciples of John differed greatly from the friendship of the generality of men, it was based upon virtue: they sought not their own interest as many do. This is evident from their conduct after the death of John. “When John was beheaded, his disciples came, took the body and buried it.”—*Matth.*, xiv. 12.

III. “*Sending two of his disciples, they said to Him: Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?*” He certainly did not send his disciples for his own instruction, but for theirs; for at the baptism of Christ, he had heard a voice saying: “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”—*Matth.*, iii. 17. He had pointed out Christ to the multitudes in these words: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world.”—*John* i. 29. And when the Scribes and Pharisees had deputed a solemn embassy to him to know if he was the Messiah whom according to the Scriptures they expected about that time, he humbly confesed that he was not the Christ, but that the Messiah was standing in the midst of them. From this, it is evident that John did not send his disciples for his own information, for he knew that Christ was the Messiah that was to come. He was anxious to lead his disciples to Christ for whom he had prepared them. He sent them himself to Christ that they might be convinced of His divine wisdom and of His power of working miracles, or in other words of His Divinity. John’s disciples came to Christ, asking Him: “Art Thou He that art to come or do we look for another?” Does He answer them positively: “Yes, I am He that is to come?” No, He does not, but He speaks to them, instead, through His works, His miracles; for Jesus making answer, said to them: “Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” By these wonderful words Christ proved Himself to be the promised Messiah. Six hundred years before His coming Isaias had prophesied: “Take courage and fear not, God Himself will come and save you. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of

the deaf shall be unstopped, the lame man shall leap as the hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free.”—*Is.*, xxxv. 4, 6. Christ performed all these miracles. He not only made the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear, but He raised the dead to life. Thus the prophecy was fulfilled. He whom Isaias had foretold, had all these marks, and now no man dare doubt, even for a moment, that Jesus was the promised Messias.

IV. These words, spoken by Christ to the disciples of John, contain both a lesson and a caution for us. By them, He teaches us that it is better for us to make our works speak than our tongues; by them, He cautions us not to boast in words what we are, but to show it in our actions. Many call themselves Catholics, but do not show their Catholicity by works of faith and charity. Many boast of being Catholics, but are such only nominally—as if the mere name, alone, could save them. Hath Christ ever said that the mere name of Christian or Catholic will save a man? Did any of the Apostles ever say it? Does the Catholic Church teach such a doctrine? No, the name of Catholic cannot save us unless we practise what the Catholic Church teaches. There are only too many of these nominal Catholics who will wrangle for religion, write for it, fight for it, die for it, anything but live for it; they are Catholics with their tongues, but in their works they show that there is very little Catholicity about them. They have Jacob’s voice, but Esau’s hands. It will avail us nothing to be members of the true Church, unless we practise her doctrines, and live up to her rules and regulations. What did it avail Judas to have been one of the twelve Apostles? What will it profit us to believe well, and to live ill? Faith without works is dead, and “in Christ nothing avails but faith that worketh by charity.”—*Gal.* v. 6. “As the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”—*James*, ii. 26.

V. “*Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me.*” Although the holy life of Jesus and the miracles which He wrought were a strong and undeniable proof of His Divinity, there was an obstacle in the way which prevented the Jews from acknowledging Him as the promised Messiah. They were accustomed to rely upon those prophecies in which He is foretold as a mighty king; they overlooked those oracles which speak of His profound humiliation in the form of a servant. According to their carnal and sensual ideas He was to be a powerful monarch who would restore the kingdom of Israel to its former greatness and splendor, and subject all nations to the sceptre of Juda. How then could they bring themselves to believe that Jesus was the Christ when they saw Him poor: when He had not a home wherein to lay His head; when He died the most ignominious death on the cross? For this reason Christ said on var-

ious occasions: "Blessed are they that shall not be scandalized in Me." Yes, blessed is he who in His humiliation perceives His divine greatness; in His poverty, His riches; and in the simplicity of the Gospel, the sublimity of divine wisdom. Blessed he who with the eye of faith sees the Divinity concealed under the form of a servant, who acknowledges in Christ the Desired of all nations, the Lamb immolated from the beginning, the Sacrifice and the Priest, the Prince of Peace, and the Father of the Future. Blessed is he who sees God in the Infant Christ wrapped in rags and weeping like any other child, but adored and glorified by the Angels; persecuted by Herod, but worshiped by the Wise Men from the East; who, indeed, had not where in to lay His head, but who by His divine power commanded the tempest to cease; before whose omnipotent words the devils fled, and whom all nature obeyed. Christ is a stumbling-block to the carnal Jews, and folly to the Gentiles, but heavenly Wisdom to the believing Christian. Many of the Jews were scandalized in Him, especially on account of His works of mercy, and because He performed them on the Sabbath day. This was what we call Pharisaical scandal, and according to the example of Jesus, we need not strive to avoid this kind of scandal. Some are scandalized at everything they see others do, or hear others say. God, when upon earth, could not please everybody, much less can we. But there is a real scandal which consists in bad example, and in enticing others to sin. And of this scandal Christ says: "Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones who believe in Me; it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."—*Mark*, ix. 42. And again: "Woe to the world because of scandals.—*Matth.*, xviii. 7. Those who have done evil sometimes seek to palliate their sin by saying: "I was tempted to do it, I have been seduced." But I say, unhappy the man that seduces others to sin but, also, unhappy those who suffer themselves to be seduced. Why did God give you power of will, why did He give you reason and understanding? Imitate your Lord and Master, and say to the tempter: "Begone from me, Satan!"

VI. *When the disciples went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitude concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed-shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings.*" Christ praised John for his constancy and courage. John would suffer and die in prison, rather than call evil good, rather than countenance sin by his silence. John was not like a reed shaken with the wind, but like a strong, towering oak-tree, which the wind can neither bend nor break. Herod might grant the request of the fair dancer, but the silent lips of the head lying on the dish, cried out loudly to the guilty conscience of the murderer: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife!"

Let us learn from this saint to suffer, and, if necessary, to die for the known truth and duty. Let us learn to be faithful to our purposes and not to waver between great sins and pious resolutions. But how did John arrive at such fortitude and firmness of character? By the virtues of sobriety and self-denial which Christ praises in him, and which we as Christians, are bound, also, to practice. He who desires to persevere in doing good, must restrain his appetites, be contented with little, and not repine in want and poverty. Man needs but little here below, nor does he need that little long. Delicacy in eating and drinking, the gratification of the palate, the love of ease and comfort, extravagance in dress and other adornments, are the causes of numberless sins. A maiden who too highly values her fineries and ornaments will easily lose her bashfulness, then her innocence, her peace of mind and conscience; and she will soon weep for the loss of a treasure which no tears can ever bring back to her. Nothing can be a brighter ornament to a young woman than the beauty of innocence. If her conscience does not reproach her, she will sleep well upon straw, even though it be in a prison—for a good conscience is a soft pillow.

VII. *“But what went you out to see? a prophet? yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet, for this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee.”* It had been foretold of John: “And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias to prepare for the Lord a perfect people.”—*Luke*, i. 17. Christ called John the greatest among those that are born of women.—*Matth*, ii. 2. Considering his miraculous birth, his vocation, the faithful performance of his mission, his austere life and his holy death, we must admit that he really deserved this panegyric. He was the last of the prophets, and with his death the Old Testament came to a close. With one foot he stands in the land of the Law and Promise, and with the other upon ground hallowed by Christianity. John was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, to prepare for the Lord a perfect people. The salvation of the Jews entirely depended on their acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. For this reason, he forcibly insisted that they should acknowledge Him as such. To know Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer must be our only care and business. No other knowledge is so necessary or so important, no other so valuable and so advantageous. A Christian who knows God, is cheerful, for he sees in God, his Father, and in Christ, his Brother; in all mankind he beholds his brethren and sisters redeemed by the precious Blood, and he loves all for God’s sake.

Daily to grow in this love which prepares the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths and to prepare for the Lord a perfect people, must be our firm resolution. For this end let us during this holy season of Advent meditate on the great love of the God-Man which has

made itself manifest in His Incarnation. Let us prepare ourselves by prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds for the worthy celebration of the festival of Christmas; and thus prepared, let us live in the blessed hope of seeing and enjoying God for ever in the mansions of eternal bliss. Amen.

O. S. B.

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### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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#### NECESSITY FOR DOING PENANCE.

*"John answered them, saying: I baptize in water." — John. i. 26.*

The best preparation for the advent of our Redeemer is that which John the Baptist recommended to the Jews. He repaired to the river Jordan, baptizing all that came to him. By this baptism, he intended to awaken in their hearts a desire to do penance for their sins; for he says: "I baptize in water unto penance;" and hence, St. Mark calls the baptism of John, the baptism of penance: "John was in the desert baptizing and preaching the baptism of penance unto the remission of sins." Penance, then, is the best preparation for solemnizing the birth of Jesus. But in order to be acceptable to God, this penance should reform the whole man. Oh! how fitly and excellently could this so necessary reformation and renovation be accomplished, if the spirit of compunction would discharge the duty of a just avenger; if it would exercise a rigorous and exact vigilance over all those senses and faculties which lead us to rebel against God; and would set a guard over all those avenues through which sin enters into the heart. The sources of this rebellion are the senses of the body, the passions of the heart, and the faculties of the soul. If the spirit of compunction would arm itself against these three fountain-heads of rebellion against God, in a short time a great change would be discernible in the lives of men, and heaven would shower upon them many blessings and graces. If you my brethren, are really desirous of making a good preparation for the approaching commemoration of the birth of Christ, you must renew the whole man by mortification and self-denial in such a manner that, henceforth *your senses, passions, and faculties serve unto justice, as heretofore they have served unto sin and iniquity.*

I. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans says: "As you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification," as if he would say: You have heretofore served under the banner of sin, serve now

under the banner of virtue; you have sustained the kingdom of vice, henceforth, labor for and support the kingdom of virtue; for the sake of justice, strive, at least, to undergo the same pains and fatigues, which you have undergone for the sake of injustice and sin. This is more than a simple advice; for the Apostle goes on to say: "I speak a human thing, because of the infirmity of your flesh," as if he would say: I have a right to ask of you what the prophet Baruch asked of your ancestors; that now, as a proof of your sincere repentance, you do *ten times* as much for God as you formerly did against Him. These are the words of the prophet Baruch: "As it was your mind to go astray from God, so when you return again, you shall seek him ten times as much;" that is, you went astray from God, of your own free will and choice; you bent your knee to Baal and served the flesh, the devil, and the world,—now you see your folly and are anxious to return to God. And what, in this case, is the counsel of the prophet Baruch? You are to serve God ten-times as much; that is, the measure of your repentance must far surpass the enormity of your sin. But I do not ask that much of you, says St. Paul, "because of the infirmity of your flesh." I know your weakness and, therefore, I will be satisfied with less; I ask nothing of you but what you can easily perform; I ask, only, that with your members you now render unto justice as many services as, heretofore, you have rendered unto sin: "As you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification."

You might, perhaps, infer from this that no satisfaction is required for sin, and that it is enough for a sinner to quit his evil ways and to reform his life. But this is not so. Penance does not consist merely in quitting sin, but also in making atonement for sins committed. If true penance consisted only in offending God no more, then the sinner who dies unrepentant, would be saved, because he has ceased to offend God. Something more than that is required. It is in the order of grace as it is in the order of nature. He who has injured his neighbor, must repair the injury. It is not enough for him to say: "I will injure him no more, I will steal and cheat no more, but I will keep what I have unjustly taken from him." No, he must fulfill a double duty; he must make restitution to the person he has wronged, and afterwards injure him no more. A true conversion consists not only in ceasing to offend God, but also in making reparation for the insults offered to Him. If penance required only a change of life, it would be very easy to become a saint; but no, the justice of God requires something more. The sinner must not only forsake and change his line of conduct, but he must also satisfy God for the evil he has committed. If *the senses* by crossing the limits of what is lawful, have enjoyed illicit pleasures, will it suffice after returning to obedience to desist from further transgressions? No, certainly not. Reparation must also be made. The rebellious senses

must exchange the servitude of vice for the service of virtue; they must humble themselves under the yoke of the Lord, which they had cast off. If *the eye* has been bold enough to gaze upon immodest objects, it is not enough that, henceforth, it confine its glances within the limits of modesty. Reparation must be made, it must wash away with penitential tears all those indecent liberties, in which it, heretofore, indulged. If *the tongue* has given way to slander and detraction, to cursing, swearing and blaspheming, to immodest discourses and songs, it is not enough that it should now abstain from all those criminal offences,—but, henceforth, it must endeavor to edify others in reparation for having so frequently scandalized them. If *the hand* has been covetously extended to grasp the property of others, it is not enough, now, to simply allow every one to enjoy unmolested what belongs to him; no, restitution must be made, and the covetous hand must open its purse, give alms, and practically display its charity to the poor. In a word, we cannot call repentance true and sincere unless every member of the body, which has participated in sin, becomes also a partaker of its penance, and strives to repair its past offences by the practice of the opposite virtues.

II. This is the essential idea of penance given by all the Fathers of the Church. Such was *the penance of the Ninevites*. As soon as they heard those words of Jonas: "In forty days hence, your city shall be destroyed," the whole nation, from the prince to the people, fasted and repented of their sins. They were not satisfied with a mere change of life, they were not contented with merely quitting sin, but they mortified their flesh by coarse sackcloth, endeavoring to atone for the evil they had done. And their penance was so acceptable to God, that He stopped His hand and withdrew the vials of His vengeance which He had been ready to pour out upon them. Such was *David's repentance*. He was assured by Nathan, that God had forgiven him his sin, yet he never ceased to do penance. He laid aside his crown and his royal purple: he clothed himself with sackcloth, and put ashes on his head; and lived a model of penitents to the end of his life. He was assured of the forgiveness of his sins, yet such was his penitential life. We know that we have often and grievously offended God, but we are not sure that our sins are forgiven us. Without a special revelation from God such as David had, no one here on earth can know whether he be worthy of love or hatred. Where then is our penance? Where are our penitential tears? We eat and drink and enjoy ourselves after the commission of sin as well as before it, just as if nothing had happened. "I have done evil, and what harm has befallen me?" David said: "My grief is always in my sight, my sin is always against me." His sin was ever present to his view, although it was forgiven; his sorrow for it only ended with his life. Such was *Mary Magdalen's repentance*. She had

the happiness to hear from the lips of Jesus Himself, that much was forgiven her, because she loved much. But just because she dearly loved her God, she could not moderate her grief; she could not forget her sins. She reflected seriously upon what she had done, and accordingly she set no bounds to the number and fervor of her penitential works. As before her conversion she yielded her members to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so after her conversion she made all the members of her body and all the faculties of her soul serve justice unto sanctification. Such was *St. Peter's repentance*. Nothing could make him forget the denial of his Master. He never afterwards heard the cock crow without weeping bitterly at the remembrance of his sin.

What is there that fails to recall to us the remembrance of our sins? We have sinned against heaven and earth, but where is our repentance? Why are we so dilatory? At what time will we commence to do penance, if not in these days, during which our holy Faith brings before our eyes the image of that divine Child, who, suffering for our sakes, comes into the world in order to reconcile us to His heavenly Father? He was no sooner born than He began to do penance for oursins. In effect, what was that poor stable, that contemptible manger, that couch of straw, that piercing cold, those tears which He shed, what are they all but undeniable proofs of the most austere penance, which He commences to endure for our sake? If we would often look with the eyes of faith upon this young and innocent Penitent, I am sure, we would never yield to unlawful pleasures. If we frequently meditated upon the profound humiliations of this divine Child, if we seriously reflected upon those tears, which poured forth from the eyes of this royal Babe, we would certainly bewail and detest our sins which were the cause of His sufferings. And if, on beholding a God who sighs, a God who weeps, a God who trembles with cold,—if, on beholding a God whose tears are not for Himself but for us and our sins,—our hearts are not moved to sentiments of compunction, then we may exclaim with St Bernard: “O the hardness of heart! O callous, stony heart, when wilt thou be softened, if not when thou seest thy God become a child for thee, a God who sighs, weeps, and suffers for thee!” Ah, my brethren, you have often, often wept for your passions, for the world and the things of the world; you have wept for the loss of a father, a mother, wife, or husband, child or friend, have you then no tears for having offended God who shed the last drop of His blood for you? Have you no tears for having despised your God who suffered so much for you from the Crib to the Cross? You have tears for the loss of everything and everybody, but none for the loss of your God. O shame! Here, should you justly weep; here, your tears are necessary; here, they should be freely indulged in, for they are the saving tribute of repentance: on all other occasions, their flow should be checked, or, at least, in a measure moderated.

Listen to me, my brethren; John began his mission with these words: “*Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*” Christ came after John, and He preached the very same sermon: “*Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.*” The Apostles after Christ, re-echoed the teaching of their divine Master. Wherever they went, they announced to the people: God declares unto men, *that all shall do penance.* Observe how universal are the terms: “*All men*”, without exception. God is no respecter of persons; nothing avails with Him except an innocent or a penitent life. Nowhere can man elude this precept, it binds him wherever he may be. All men of whatever clime, or tongue, or color, are bound to do penance, under all circumstances, in all places, all the days of their lives. Therefore, once more, if you wish to save your souls listen to me. That grand message which God sent Jonas to declare to the Ninevites, the prophets to the Jews,—Jesus Christ, His Apostles and their successors to the whole world,—I, also, publish to you to-day, my brethren, in His name and by His authority. Meditate upon it, sitting in the house and walking on your journey; sleeping and waking, bind it as a sign upon your hand, write it in the entry, and on the doors of your dwelling, that “unless you do penance, you shall perish.” Amen.

O. S. B.

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### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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#### HUMILITY.

“*Who art thou?*”—John i. 19.

This is a question which we should frequently ask ourselves, in order to acquire a true knowledge of what we really are: for as the ignorance of ourselves is the source of pride and vanity, so the true knowledge of ourselves is the powerful counterpoise which balances the soul, and brings her down to the proper level of Christian humility. Who art thou? This is the question which the priests and Levites put to John. He might easily have taken advantage of their mistaken notion; by a single word he might have induced the whole synagogue to believe him to be the Messiah. But his humility would not suffer him to pretend to any merit or aspire to any dignity which was not justly due to him. It was a perfect knowledge of himself that made him so little in his own eyes; the low and contemptible opinion he had of himself and of his own insufficiency made him forget all his high prerogatives, and appear in his own eyes a mere nothing, not even worthy to loose the latchet of the

Messiah's shoes. "I am," says he, "the voice of one crying in the desert,"—an empty sound in the air, which vanishes like smoke. Behold here, my brethren, a perfect model of humility for your imitation, if you aspire to a happy union with your blessed Redeemer, if you wish Him to take possession of your hearts at this holy season. It is in vain for you to expect that you will attain to this happiness without the virtue of humility; it is only upon the meek and humble that He bestows His favors and blessings. This morning, I shall lay before you *the motives and advantages* that should persuade you to be truly humble.

I. There are two kinds of humility, *humility of the intellect and understanding*, and *humility of the heart and will*. Humility of the intellect and understanding makes us know and acknowledge that of ourselves we are nothing and can do nothing, and that we owe all that we have to God's pure bounty. Humility of the heart and will is founded on a feeling sense and an experimental knowledge of our own weakness. It makes us sincerely despise ourselves, and renders us willing to be despised by others from a conviction that we are deserving of contempt. How few Christians will you find who are habitually in this interior disposition! How few are there who continually carry in their hearts this intimate conviction of their insignificance and unworthiness! There is nothing in which we more frequently deceive ourselves. We believe with a speculative faith, that all glory should be given to God alone, but in practice we do not conform our sentiments to this belief; nor do we habitually render to God, the glory which is His due. Many grasp at the shadow, few embrace the substance of humility. Many are humble in their words: they frequently say: "I am a poor sinner, there is no evil which I do not deserve for my sins;" but inwardly, they are the dupes of a sinful, refined pride, which they artfully disguise and conceal under this mask of an apparent humility, this cloak of an affected modesty. The humility of most people goes no farther than their understanding, it does not reach the heart. Yet humility of the understanding will avail us little without humility of the heart. The devils themselves understand full well their own baseness, abjection, and misery; but they are lacking in humility of heart and will. True Christian humility is a virtue by which a man from a true knowledge of himself is contemptible in his own eyes. It makes him have an humble opinion of himself, and despise himself, for it springs from a true knowledge of his own infirmities and imperfections, and makes him undervalue the judgments of men, and disregard the empty praises and applause of the world.

Everything preaches to us this salutary lesson; on the one hand,—humility; on the other,—gratitude to our Creator. He alone is the origin and centre of all that is good, and consequently, all honor, glory, and

praise are due to Him alone; we owe all we possess to Him; and of ourselves we have nothing but ignorance, weakness, misery, and sin. In our nature we have the very essence of frailty; when left to ourselves, we are capable of nothing but of rushing headlong into every kind of disorder. All the good qualities that we may, perhaps, be supposed to possess, whether of nature or of grace, are the pure gifts of God. They are talents deposited in our hands, to be employed for His greater honor and glory. And since much will be required of those to whom much has been given, the more favors we have received, the more we should tremble at the thought of the rigorous account we must render of our stewardship on the last day; and the more we should humble ourselves in the abyss of our nothingness.

Among the many motives which should lead us to humility, let us but attentively consider what kind of a being man is. "Man born of woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries."—*Job*, xiv. 1. This is the picture which holy Job draws of man; and the Apostle St. Paul for this reason states his conclusion that if any man seem to himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself. We are, indeed, nothing, of ourselves. Consider how many ages had passed away before we had even an existence. Nay, more; we would still be abyssed at this hour in our primitive nothingness, had not the Almighty been pleased to draw us from that chaos, and give us a being. Of ourselves, we are nothing but poor, vile, miserable sinners,—subject to many vices, imperfections, and unruly passions. In sin we are born, in sin we have lived, and in sin we may, possibly, die. We have sinned against heaven and earth; we have offended the infinite majesty of God, and have deserved the torments of hell-fire; we have, therefore, merited to be despised by all creatures, and to be trampled upon by merciless devils for an endless eternity.

What can be more humbling? What pride can hold out against this reflection? We are sure that we are sinners, that we have offended the Lord our God; we are not sure that we have as yet obtained the happy remission of our sins, because we are not sure that our sorrow for them has had all the qualities that would entitle us to the benefit of divine mercy; or that our penance, being proportioned to the greatness of our offences, has been sufficient to disarm the justice of God. We march without ceasing towards the grave, uncertain what will be our lot in the other world which lies beyond it. We know that at the moment of death an eternity of happiness or an eternity of misery must inevitably be our fate, and we have no certainty in this world which of the two will fall to our lot; no one here on earth, without a special revelation, can know whether he be worthy of hatred or love. Nay, though we were even assured that our past sins were all forgiven, though we were assured of being at present in the state of grace, still we can have no assurance that

we shall not relapse and die in a state of reprobation. We have no assurance that we shall persevere unto the end of our lives in the love and friendship of God, amidst the many dangerous occasions of sin that await us, and the various snares of the enemy that are spread around us on all sides to surprise us and draw us into vice. We are not stronger than Sampson who fell a victim to his passions; we are not wiser than Solomon, who became an idolator at the end of his life: we are not holier than king David who, by one unguarded glance of his eyes, was led into murder and adultery; we are not more perfect than St. Peter, who denied his Lord and Master three different times. The downfall of these great men alarmed the Saints themselves, and made them tremble for their own salvation, though their conscience reproached them with no mortal sin. Our blindness and presumption, therefore, must be very great if we suffer pride to reign in our hearts, since there is no state of life so perfect in which a Christian is not exposed to the danger of falling into sin, losing God's grace, and perishing eternally.

Since the first angel was lost in heaven, the first man in paradise, and Judas, the apostle, in the school of Jesus Christ,—there can be no positive security for any soul here on earth. The predestination of man is a hidden mystery to us, and one of which it is impossible to judge by our present dispositions. How good soever you may at present be, you may change at any moment; and alas! that change, in its results, may be an eternal one. How good soever you may at present be, you have still reason to fear both your own inconstancy in the practice of virtue, and your future obstinacy in sin. “Wherefore, let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall.”—*I. Cor. x. 12.* You have seen your neighbor fall into sin, be charitable; and do not publish abroad his failings. Despise him not on account of his short-comings, much less esteem yourself better than he, for you will certainly fall into the same sins if God withdraws His helping hand from you. Return thanks to God, therefore, that you were not led into the same temptation. Far from despising sinners, far from condemning such a person, for example, as wicked, and applauding yourself as virtuous, you must bring yourself to entertain quite a different opinion, and reflect that this man whom you proudly despise, may perhaps be of the number of the elect, and you, of the number of the reprobate. It may happen that he falls into sin to-day to rise from it to-morrow, whereas you may fall to-morrow never to rise again. It may be that he has already done penance for the very sin on account of which you despise him, and you may happen to fall into that sin, and die in final impenitence. God, perhaps, has destined him to be a model of penance, and you, to be a terrifying example to all proud souls.

II. Nothing is more pleasing to God, or more necessary for our sal-

vation than that we should be truly humble. Open but the Book of books, the Holy Bible, and you will be convinced of the benefits and salutary effects of humility. By humility, Christianity began; by humility, it has been established; and on humility, it is founded. Christ gave us an example, that we might imitate it; He showed us the road to heaven that we might follow Him. He humbled Himself so far as to become man, to be born in extreme poverty, and to die on a cross the death of a malefactor. He began and completed His victory over hell by humility. He chose for His precursor a saint whose distinguishing characteristic was humility; and He selected the most humble of mortals to make her His ever-immaculate Mother. Christ's whole life was a perfect example of the most consummate humility; and His preaching tended entirely to implant this virtue in our hearts. He says to all His followers: "Learn of Me," (not to conquer nations, to become rich and respected in this world, to work miracles or to draw all eyes admiringly upon you) but, "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart," learn to be mean and contemptible in your own eyes. He was rich, but for our sake He became poor, that we might become rich by His poverty. He divests himself of His glory, hides His immensity under the members of a weak, helpless child, wrapped in rags, laid in a manger, and destitute of all earthly pomp and grandeur. A powerful medicine this, indeed; if it does not cure our pride, I know not what will. God becomes man, and all the frailty, all the infirmities of human nature, do not convince us that we are but men. Can we pretend while filled with vain conceit of ourselves, ever to be members of so humble a Head, ever to be enrolled among the disciples of Christ and heirs of His kingdom? No, certainly. He strictly enjoins on all His followers to imitate His example. Having waited on His disciples, and washed their feet, He said to them: "I have given you an example, that as I have done, you may do also." Unless we imitate our divine Master in this heavenly virtue, unless we become like little children by humility, we cannot hope to be sharers of His kingdom, for He has said: "Unless you become like one of these little ones, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—*Matth.*, xviii. 3.

Nothing so powerfully attracts the favor of Almighty God, or renders us as acceptable in His sight, as humility. It was humility which made the Blessed Virgin Mary so precious and pleasing to the Most Holy Trinity and which raised her to the eminent dignity of Mother of God. It was this humility which crowned all the other virtues of St. John the Baptist, and rendered him so great a favorite of heaven. The Jews seeing his miraculous life and eminent sanctity, despatched an embassy to him to know if he was the Christ, but he confessed in all humility that he was not, that the true Messiah was then standing unknown or unrecognized, in the midst of them; that he, His humble precursor, deemed

himself unworthy to untie the latchet of His shoes. They asked him then, if he were not Elias; but he answered: "No." "Art thou a prophet?" Again: "No." And when the puzzled deputies urge him to give them an answer wherewith they may satisfy those that sent them, he responds at last: "I am the voice of one crying in the desert." Being truly humble, he was in his own eyes, a mere nothing. Humbling himself thus low, he deserved to be so highly exalted that Christ Himself deigned to preach his panegyric, to honor him with the noblest character ever given to man; for the lips of Eternal Truth have declared that "among those born of women there has not risen a greater, than John the Baptist."

Without humility all other means of salvation become useless and unprofitable. Penance, which is the last resource of the sinner, can have no force unless the heart be humbled and touched with a deep sense of its own unworthiness. If you be profoundly humble, though your sins were as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore, they will all be forgiven, for God can refuse no grace for which the humble soul petitions. He resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. We have a remarkable instance of this in the proud Pharisee and the humble Publican. The presumptuous well-doer was despised and rejected in spite of the glittering show of his apparent good works and virtues, while the humble sinner was accepted by God. Why so? Because the virtues of the former were accompanied by pride, and the sins of the latter, by humility. Great and marvellous is the power of humility. In one moment it can make a saint of a sinner, while pride, in the same brief space of time, transforms a saint into a reprobate. Without humility the whole fabric of a spiritual life must fall to the ground, for humility is the foundation and the corner-stone of the spiritual edifice. No virtue can be meritorious for eternal life unless it be preceded, accompanied, and followed by humility. Pride cast the angels out of Paradise, the first man out of the Garden of Eden; it was the first sin committed above in heaven; and the first sin committed below on earth. Pride, in fine, is not the path which leads to the celestial mansions, but the sure road to the abyss of hell. Therefore, my brethren, if you wish one day to arrive at the gates of heaven, you must necessarily take another road from that which led the apostate angels and our first parents to eternal ruin. We must return by another way to our true home above the clouds. Renouncing the devil with all his pride and all his pomps, we must courageously embrace holy humility. In vain do we pretend to be disciples of Christ unless we learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart. In vain can we expect to be of the number of His elect, the sharers of His kingdom, unless we have some resemblance to Him, for the Apostle says: "Those who are predestined to be of the number of God's elect must be made conformable to the image of His

Son." This plainly shows that without humility we cannot hope to be saved and exalted to the kingdom of God. Let us, therefore, conclude that nothing is more reasonable, nothing more just, nothing more necessary than that we should persevere in profound humility both of spirit and of understanding, of heart and of will, now, and to the very end of our mortal career.

May our divine Redeemer, that perfect Model of humility, grant that we may learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart; that humbling ourselves here below under the mighty hand of God, we may be found worthy hereafter to be exalted to those mansions of eternal bliss which He has prepared in His love for the truly humble followers of the humble Jesus!

GAHAN.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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POWER IS GIVEN TO US TO BE MADE THE SONS OF GOD.

*"All flesh shall see the salvation of God."*--Luke iii. 6.

In the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent, we read: "Then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty;" and in the Gospel for this day, the fourth and last Sunday of Advent, we read: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Both these passages reveal the vision of the Incarnate God, but with this difference: the one depicts Him appearing as Christ the Judge, the other portrays Him about to be manifested as Christ the Redeemer. Judge and Redeemer united in one and the same person. The coming of the Judge differs greatly from the advent of the Redeemer. As Judge, He shall appear in the clouds with great power and majesty, encompassed by Angels and Saints; as Redeemer, He comes in the most profound humility; as Judge, He displays Himself in the form of infinite majesty; as Redeemer, in the form of a helpless infant; as Judge, He will show no mercy, but inflexible justice; as Redeemer, He will show mercy to sinners, who turn from their evil ways and are converted. These two advents of Christ are articles of faith; we are bound to believe that as He once came to redeem and save the world, so He shall come again to judge the living and the dead. When He shall come as Judge, all men will behold Him, those that have lived, those that are living, and those that shall live even unto the end of time. Now, in the Gospel of this day, we read: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God," that is, all flesh shall see their Redeemer, their Saviour, their God. Is this to be understood in

the sense that all the children of Adam who have lived, are living, and will live to the end of time, shall see Him with their corporal eyes? No, by the words, "all flesh," (that is, all mankind,) "shall see the salvation of God," is meant, that salvation shall be offered to all that wish to embrace it; that all men shall see their Saviour, God, not physically, with their corporal eyes, but morally, with the eyes of faith. All flesh shall see the salvation of God, for God wills not the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. God wills all men to be saved, and none to be lost. Christ really came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost; and He died for the salvation of all. Grace is offered to all, but all do not coöperate with grace. It is left to our own free choice to see, or not to see, the salvation of God, but when He shall come as Judge, we shall be obliged to see Him even against our will.

1. The Church celebrates to-day the last Sunday of Advent, and she exhorts us to prepare the way of the Lord, that is, to prepare our hearts for the reception of Jesus by cleansing them from sin. No one is fit to receive Him who has not a heart free from sin. It is His delight to dwell with those who are clean of heart. He says in the Canticles: "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the gate, I will come in to him." God most ardently desires to dwell in your hearts, dear brethren. It is impossible for the human heart to remain neutral in its affections; it must necessarily be devoted either to the creature or to the Creator, both cannot dwell together within its narrow precincts. Cast out the creature and receive the Creator into your hearts; in receiving Him, you receive your greatest blessing; in rejecting Him, you do yourselves the greatest of injuries.

Christ never went into a house without imparting to it His blessing. He visited Martha and Mary, and what was the result? Besides raising Lazarus to life, He lavished His graces upon those two sisters, so that the one was admitted into heaven as a virgin, and the other, as a penitent. He visited Zacchæus, and the visit conferred a signal benefit upon him and his whole household, since Christ said: "This day salvation is come to this house." Zacchæus from a usurer became charitable to the poor; from a lover of the world and the things of the world, he became a true lover and follower of Christ. That same dear Redeemer went to visit Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and Matthew, hearing His divine voice, ceased to be an unjust publican; was converted and became an apostle of Christ, an evangelist, and finally a martyr. Nay, even while a prisoner in the womb, that Blessed Lord visited Elizabeth, and the visit of Mary's Son, (revealing His hidden presence through Mary's voice) filled the devout spouse of Zachary with the Holy Ghost; the unborn Baptist leaped with joy in his mother's womb, and was cleansed from original sin.

St. John the Evangelist reveals the greatness of the blessing descend-

ing from heaven upon all those who receive Christ, in these words: "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name."—*John*, i. 12. We are created according to the image and likeness of God, but not content with this, He would honor and favor us with another prerogative; He would exalt us to the dignity of sons of God. Thus what Christ is by nature, we are by grace; what Christ is by birth, we are by adoption: "sons of God." It is so great a dignity to be the sons of God, that St Paul does not hesitate to say in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "To which of the angels hath God said at any time: Thou art My Son." These words, properly speaking, refer to the human nature which the Son of God assumed and whose Incarnation we solemnize on Christmas Day, but they also refer in some degree to mankind in general. God created two kinds of rational creatures, the Angels in heaven, and man upon earth; both sinned by disobedience, yet how different was the fate of the one from that of the other! God exercised the rigor of His justice against the rebellious angels, and showed mercy to fallen man. He did not assume the nature of an angel in order to redeem the apostate angels and atone for their sin; no, no, they were irretrievably lost, no Redeemer was ever promised to them; but, in order to show mercy to man, to redeem him from sin and hell, He our divine Lord became like one of ourselves in everything, sin alone excepted. Thus it is that, considering the mercy extended to man, and the rigorous punishment awarded the fallen angels, St. Paul extols man over the angels, emphasizing the fact that God had never said at any time to one of the angelic hosts: "Thou art My Son."

This title, Son of God, strictly speaking, belongs to Christ alone, but it is the will of God that we also should be called and should be the sons of God, that we should call God our Father: "Our Father who art in heaven." Human nature could not aspire to the possession of a greater honor and dignity than this one prerogative which excels all others. God is pleased to call man His son, and man is privileged to call God his Father. But the question is: Are all men sons of God, are all children of God? No. "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name." Therefore, only those who receive Him, who believe in Him, are children of God. By the assumption of human nature, Christ became the Son of Man, by the reception of God into the heart of man, power is given to him to make himself a son of God.

Being children of God, God is with us, and God being with us, who can be against us? What shall separate us from Him? Neither hunger, nor thirst, nor tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor the sword; even though we should be abandoned by the whole world, reduced to cry out with the man who was languishing under his infirmity for thirty-

eight years: "I have no man;" or with David: "My father and my mother have left me,"—if we have God in our hearts, we can say: "The Lord hath taken me up." The greatest evil is small, the greatest loss is gain to those who can exclaim: "God is our solace and our strength!" If we receive Christ, He will receive us and admit us to a participation in His graces; He will give us power to become the sons of God, and the heirs of His eternal kingdom.

II. As a blessing attends the opening of the heart to God; so a curse follows its closing against His sweet presence. If we shut our hearts, as the Bethlehemites shut their doors against the Redeemer, we are our own worst enemies; God will not permit us to do so with impunity. He bitterly complains that men will not receive Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." And again: "No one will receive Me." In the Canticles we read that the bridegroom knocks at the door of his spouse: "Open to me, my sister, for my head is full of dew." But the spouse answers with contempt: "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" The Bridegroom is Christ, the spouse is the soul of man. This heavenly bridegroom knocks at the door of our hearts and prays for admittance, but after all His entreaties, the door remains closed. What prevents the soul from opening the heart to God? The passions, the sinful, wicked passions of man. In some hearts self-love is deeply rooted; in others, the fire of impure love is burning; everything evil is admitted, God alone is excluded; He is despised, there is no room for Him. The spouse in the Canticles refused to open the door when requested by the bridegroom. After a while, regretting her inconsiderateness, she opened it, as she says herself: "I opened the bolt of my door, but he had turned aside and was gone. I sought him, but found him not; I called and he did not answer me." She had well-deserved her fate. Christ also knocks at the door of our hearts, and prays for admission, but we resemble the spouse in the Canticles; dreading a slight inconvenience, we do not open the door to let Him in; like her, we have a thousand excuses; we have to do this or that; at present we have no time to listen to His gracious calls. But if we do not open our hearts to Him when He calls, He will pass us by, and give His rejected graces to another. Afterwards, we will see our folly; we shall seek but not find Him, we will call Him, but He will not answer, or if He answer, what answer will it be? He shall say to us what He said to the foolish virgins: "I know you not."

This reprobation is foreshadowed in the parable of the vineyard. God asks the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Juda: "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard that I have not done to it? Now I will show you what I will do to My vineyard. I will

take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted. I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. I will make it desolate, it shall not be pruned, it shall not be dug; briers and thorns shall come up, and I will command the clouds to rain no rain on it." The vineyard is the heart of man. God has done for that heart all that He could, and with justice He asks : What is there that I ought to do more that I have not done to it? I have planted it, watered it with the dew of grace; I have suffered and died for it. Man, what more could I do? Could I do more than lay down My life for you? Now, I will make it desolate, it shall not be dug; briers and thorns shall come up, that is, sins, vices, crimes, and many evil habits. God will command the heavens to rain no longer their rain of grace upon such a soul: without the grace of God, man lives, as it were, alone, and God has pronounced woe on those who live alone, without grace: "Woe to him who is alone!"

What Christian can hate himself with such a deadly hatred as to shut his heart against his Saviour, and refuse Him admittance? Were I to ask you: "Are you willing to receive Him?" You would all answer in the affirmative. But to say so is not enough. You must prepare your hearts for the worthy reception of Jesus Christ; and the greater the guest, the greater the preparation must be. Cleanse, then, your hearts from every sin and every attachment to sin, and make them an acceptable dwelling-place for your Incarnate God. As the Ark of the Covenant would not stand in the presence of Dagon, the idol, so God cannot enter into a heart defiled by sin. Proud and haughty man! God cannot find a dwelling-place in *your* soul, for He comes in meekness and in the most profound humility. God the Saviour cannot dwell in *you*, greedy and avaricious soul, for He loves poverty. Neither will He come to *you*, envious soul, for He comes to envy no one, but to give Himself to be the food of all, whole and entire. He cannot dwell in *you*, angry man, for He comes meek and humble; nor in *you*, impure soul, for He is a lover of purity; neither will He abide in a heart that hates its neighbor, for He is the Prince of peace who commands all His followers to love even their enemies.

Let me ask all who are addicted to sin, the question which Christ asked His enemies in the garden of Olives. "Whom seek ye?" They answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." And He said to them: "I am He." And having said this: "I am He," they recoiled backward and fell to the ground. Having recovered from their fear, He asked them again: "Whom seek ye?" and they said: "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus said: "I have told you, that I am He, if, therefore, you seek Me, let these go their way." Now let me ask *you*, Christian, what do you seek? What is the aim and object of all your thoughts, wishes, and desires? With what is your mind occupied, with what are your thoughts engaged from

morning till night? Is it Jesus you are seeking in all things, and Him alone? If so, let these go their way; let everything go that is against God;—pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony, sloth, let them go; let everything go that is detrimental to your salvation, though it be as dear to you as your very life. Tell me, ye that serve the world and neglect the busyness of your eternal salvation,—what have you gained by this servitude? Perhaps a gracious look, a smile of approbation from some miserable wretch whom, if you knew his real character, you would blush to reconize. And suppose you had gained all things, gained the whole world, what shall it profit you? What is all that is in the world? What else but dust and ashes, vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit, except loving God and serving Him alone!

O my brethren, wrong your God and yourself no longer. Seek Him, return to Him; you have time as yet, but time will soon be no more for you. Seek Him now, and you shall find Him. Now is the acceptable time, now are the days of grace and mercy. The present time is yours; let it not glide away unacceptable to God and unprofitable to yourselves. Amen.

O. S. B.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

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### PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS.

*"Prepare ye the way of the Lord."—Luke, iii. 4.*

We distinguish four different Advents or comings of Jesus Christ, two of which are visible and two, invisible. The first coming was when He manifested Himself in human flesh; when He came to redeem the world. His second coming will be when He shall come in a cloud with great power and majesty on the last day to judge the world. The third coming is when He comes to visit the soul of the just man; and His fourth coming is at the hour of death, when He comes to take to Himself the souls of those who depart this life in the happy state of grace, and when He invites them to partake of the joys of the kingdom of heaven. These four comings of Jesus Christ are represented by the four Sundays of Advent, and it should be the object of our ardent desires and devout prayers, that these four comings may be accomplished in our regard by the divine mercy; particularly His spiritual advent into our hearts and souls by His holy Spirit and sanctifying grace. This is a matter of great importance, for unless Christ comes to visit us in this manner, comes, as it were, to be spiritually born in our hearts.

by sanctifying grace, it is useless and vain that He was once corporally born for us in the stable of Bethlehem. To induce you to prepare your hearts for His spiritual birth, and to dispose your souls to partake of the inestimable blessings of the approaching solemnity of Christmas, I will show you

- I. In what your preparation, and*
- II. In what your necessary dispositions should consist.*

I. John the Baptist retired to the desert when quite young, and lived there nearly thirty years, an innocent martyr and spotless victim of the most austere penance, conversing only with God. At length he came forth from his beloved retreat, and entered upon the sacred functions of his divinely-commissioned ministry. With great zeal, he preached the baptism of penance for the remission of sin; and he went about crying with a loud voice: "O children of Israel, do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight His paths. The axe is laid to the root of the tree; every tree that yieldeth not good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

John was of the opinion that he could not better prepare mankind for partaking of the grace of redemption, than by persuading sinners to renounce their evil ways and do penance for their sins. He accordingly announced to them both by word and example the absolute necessity of sincere repentance; and his labors were crowned with success. Great numbers flocked to him from all Judea, repenting and confessing their sins, to the end that they might share in the inestimable graces and blessings which the Saviour of the world brought down from heaven.

The first preparation, then, which we are to make at this time for the reception of Jesus Christ, is to purify our souls by the holy exercise of penance. It is called the baptism of penance, to give us to understand thereby, that as baptism is necessary for the remission of original sin, so repentance is necessary for the remission of those actual sins by which the grace of God is forfeited after baptism. Christ Himself declared the necessity of penance in such clear terms as to preclude every possibility of doubt, saying: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." St. Mark, therefore, plainly indicates its wonderful power and efficacy, when he styles it the Baptism of Penance. Penance is as necessary for those who, after Baptism, have fallen into sin, as Baptism is for those who are infected with original sin. When penance is true and sincere, it effaces all sorts of sins, let them be ever so grievous,

ever so numerous; it levels the highest mountains of human pride; it fills up every valley, that is, it repairs every loss, every void, which sin occasions in the soul: it rectifies what was wrong, makes straight what was crooked, and makes smooth what seemed before rough and difficult to corrupt nature. It removes every obstacle, and renders the yoke of Christ sweet and light. It gives real comfort, inward content, and solid joy; in fact, it surpasses all the satisfaction which worldlings experience in their banquets, diversions, and criminal pleasures. True and sincere repentance, my brethren, is not only a necessary disposition, but also a most effectual means to avert the wrath, and draw down upon us the blessings of heaven; to engage the Son of God to take possession of our soul by His Holy Spirit, and to induce Him to be spiritually born in our hearts by His sanctifying grace, on the approaching festival of His Nativity.

But in order that He may be spiritually born in our hearts, dear Christians, certain conditions are required, the first of which is to cleanse the heart and purify the soul from the filth of sin, that it may become a fit abode for His reception and residence; it is not for a moment to be supposed that He will accept a heart defiled with iniquity and dwell in a body that is subject to sin. A clean heart is the most acceptable present we can offer Him and it is the only dwelling-place He seeks and demands of us at this holy time. He says in the most affectionate terms: "My child, give Me thy heart," and He calls the clean of heart blessed and happy because they shall see and enjoy God. They shall be replenished with the treasures of His grace here, and with the riches of His glory hereafter. This made the royal prophet beseech the Lord most fervently to create in him a clean heart: this made him cry out with confidence and say: "An humble and contrite heart, O Lord, Thou wilt not despise!"

If, therefore, we aspire to a happy union with Jesus Christ and wish to prepare in ourselves a worthy mansion for Him at this holy time, we must before all things purify our hearts and our souls, and carefully wash off all stains of sin in the baptism of penance; in a word, we must remove everything that is offensive to the all-seeing eye of His divine Majesty. We must subdue our passions and corrupt inclinations; we must lay the axe to the root, and cut down everything inordinate. If we fail in this point, all else we can do will be to little or no purpose. Our hearts and souls cannot become the abode and temple of Him who is sanctity and purity itself, so long as they are infected with criminal affections, enslaved by unruly passions, or defiled with one single mortal sin. We cannot serve God and Mammon at one and the same time. The heart which is averted from the Creator and converted to the creature by sin, must be averted from the creature and converted to the Creator by inward compunction; the heart alone is the seat of

true repentance, as it is the seat of love. It must be truly and totally changed, it must be effectually turned from the irregular love of the world and its sinful pleasures to the love of God, who is the Fountain of all goodness. It must prefer Him and value His friendship above all else that is nearest and dearest to it on earth. It must hate and detest sin not only because it is prejudicial to the sinner and renders him liable to the everlasting torments of hell-fire, but because it is displeasing and offensive to God's infinite goodness. Without this conversion or change of the heart, my brethren, there is, there can be no true repentance. For this reason, the Holy Ghost exhorts us to be converted to God with all our hearts, to rend our hearts and not our garments, to cast off the works of darkness and to become new creatures.

II. This is the very essence of a Christian life, but it is little understood and still less attended to by the generality of modern penitents. We are so apt to be deluded and deceived on this point by outward appearances; we imagine ourselves to be very penitent, provided we can shed a few tears, vent a few sighs and moans, or run over a few devout acts of contrition, although our hearts remain, at the same time, unchanged and strongly attached to sin. Hence, there is often great reason to suspect the validity of such penitents' past confessions; great reason to look upon their repentance as imperfect and defective, either for want of that inward compunction of heart which God requires, or for want of a firm purpose of amendment and a sincere resolution to avoid the immediate occasions of sin, and repair the injuries they have done. Almighty God who sees the most secret windings of the heart, cannot be deceived or imposed upon by lying vows, verbal protestations, of outward appearances of repentance. He requires us, indeed, to produce fruits worthy of penance, and, He admonishes us to manifest our repentance by outward fasting, weeping, and mourning. But the interior dispositions of the penitent must be chiefly attended to; the heart must be penetrated with a lively sorrow for having offended God, and be firmly determined to offend Him no more.

Since, therefore, penance is the sole plank of safety remaining to you, my brethren, after the shipwreck of your baptismal innocence; since it alone can emancipate you from the fetters of sin, since without it, you cannot expect the Son of God to be born in your hearts by His grace and the Holy Spirit,—let me entreat you to listen to the voice of the great herald of heaven inviting you at this holy time to do penance for your past offences. “Do penance,” says he, “for the kingdom of God is at hand: prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make straight His paths!”

Do not let this time of mercy slip away like so many Advents which have passed and gone without any benefit or advantage to your souls.

This may probably be the last Advent that several of you will ever live to see. Do not refuse to lay hold of the mercy that is now offered to you; if you slight these precious moments, and neglect the powerful and necessary means of salvation whilst you are in health and capable of having recourse to them, the day, perhaps, may shortly come when you will wish for one hour to do penance, and, not with be able to obtain it. Delays are extremely dangerous, especially when Heaven and eternity are at stake. If any, therefore, amongst you, dear Christians, be conscious to yourselves, that you are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, let me entreat you to repent in time, and without delay. The feast of the Nativity of our Lord, is at hand: He is coming to make us a visit, to enrich our souls with His heavenly graces and blessings. He is already knocking at the door of our hearts, and pleading for a lodging therein. Can we be so ungrateful to Him, so insensible to our eternal welfare, as to refuse Him admittance, like unto the people of Bethlehem who found no room for Him in their houses? Can we be so perverse as to reject Him like unto the obstinate Jews of whom the Scripture says: "He came unto His own and His own received Him not?" Let us rather yield to the tender solicitations of our divine Redeemer, and give Him our whole hearts cleansed and purified, that we may be of the happy number of those of whom the Gospel says: "To as many as received Him He hath given power to be made the sons of God." Let us imitate the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets who longed most ardently for His coming. Let us follow the example of the pious shepherds of Bethlehem who sought Him till they had the happiness of finding Him in the manger. Let us invite Him into our hearts and souls by humble and devout prayer; and, like unto the Three Kings of the East, let us tender Him the homage of our best and richest offerings.

Such, my dear brethren, are the sentiments, such are the dispositions, which the Church endeavors to excite in her children at this holy season, uplifting her voice for this purpose with the great St. John the Baptist and frequently exhorting all the faithful to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight His paths, that He may possess our hearts and souls here by His grace, and that we may possess Him in the kingdom of His glory forever hereafter. Amen.

O. S. B.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

## THE STATE OF HUMILIATION IN WHICH JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN.

*"A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us."*—*Isaiah, ix. 6.*

What humble words to express the most stupendous mystery, that has ever been proposed to the faith of man, the most extraordinary event that the annals of the world and of religion have ever exhibited! "A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us." Hear it, O ye children of the inheritance, hear it with reverence and awe, this Child, this Son, is the Son of God, Who by an ineffable prodigy, has become the Son of Man! But it is not the mystery of the Incarnation, but the mystery of the Nativity of the Son of God and the Son of Man that I shall declare to you, to-day. I shall show that since Jesus Christ was to assume human nature, it was fitting that He should be born precisely as Jesus Christ was born. His birth, which is so humble in the eyes of the sens .s, was, by that very humility, the more worthy of Him; and the reason may be stated in these words: Because no other birth could be better adapted

- I. To His greatness,*
- II. To His wisdom, and,*
- III. To His goodness.*

I. Let us for a moment imagine a Gospel of human invention; let us suppose that the genius of carnal man had undertaken to describe the birth of our Incarnate God,—with what colors, think you, would he have painted the entry of that adorable Child into the world? What pomp and splendor would He not display! What wealth and luxury would be lavished around His cradle! What a sumptuous palace of marble would be prepared to receive Him! What splendor of gold and precious stones would have shone in every part of it! How abundantly would royal purple and the most precious tissues of the loom, be furnished for His attire! What countless multitudes of servants would emulate each other in the performance of their humble duties in His service! Now, at the sight of such a grand and gorgeous display, will you exclaim: "Oh, how resplendent, how sublime is this!" For my part, I would exclaim: "How paltry and puerile is all this, when there is question of a God! Why should He collect around Him all the frail appliances of our weakness, the frivolous ornaments with which we endeavor to clothe and decorate our misery, the deceitful goods which our avarice alone desires, the

splendid trifles, the glittering toys with which our folly sports? Can He stand in need of them? What! Can anything of earth be necessary to a God? How can that be reconciled with His sovereign independence? He would then no longer be that God who is sufficient for Himself. But it will be said: It is not for Himself, but for us; it is to make a stronger impression upon our senses, to attract our hearts more securely towards Him that such splendor is required. But where is His omnipotence in that supposition? Does He not possess supreme authority over our hearts, and is He not able to inspire us with reverence and love, without dazzling us by a vain exterior?

Where is the man who, when left to the suggestions of his own mind, to imagine and describe the Son of God descending at length upon earth, after four thousand years of expectation and impatient desires, where is the man who could conceive the idea of His being born in a stable, laid upon straw between mean animals, a feeble, silent Infant, exposed, almost naked, to the violence of a rigorous season? Where is the man who, if he described an angel appearing to announce such great tidings, instead of putting magnificent expressions in to the mouth of the heavenly messenger, could think of making him say: "A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, is born, and this is the sign whereby you shall recognize Him: You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger." No, this sublime simplicity far transcends all human conception and language.

Where could we find a certain proof of divine greatness, if we did not discover it in great and admirable effects produced by the most trifling of causes, the feeblest of means? Now, if this principle be true, look upon this Child who weeps in a manger,—what object can be meaner, feebler, more impotent? But see what He effects in the world, both before, and after, His birth. From the very dawn of creation everything speaks of Him, everything announces Him, everything sighs for His coming, and during four thousand years, the heavens and the earth are in labor to give Him birth. All the Saints, from Abel downwards, are sanctified through Him alone; the prophets are inspired for no other purpose than to describe His person and to write His history by anticipation. The vocation of Abraham, the mission of Moses, the choice of the people of God, the laws and the religion which were given to that people, have their fulfillment and their end in the mystery of Bethlehem. Empires rise and fall for no other purpose than to prepare for this one event to which everything in the universe tends. Scarce has it been accomplished—scarce has the Son of Mary beheld the light, when the Magi hasten from the East to lay their treasures at His feet. His name alone has thrown Jerusalem into consternation; the assembled Synagogue deliberates upon the interpretation of the oracles which concern Him; the impious Herod trembles upon his throne. All the power

and all the perfidy of this cruel tyrant are insufficient to stifle in the cradle a feeble Infant who has no protector upon earth. When only twelve years old, He astonishes the sages of Israel and the interpreters of the Law with His wisdom, by merely addressing to them a few simple questions in the temple. His replies, later, confound the Pharisees, Scribes and doctors of the Law; He speaks as no man ever spoke before Him. He commands Nature to obey Him; He reveals the hidden secrets of the heart; He cures every disease; He even restores life to the dead. He makes all Judea the theatre of His miracles, and fills it with the report of His name. When He dies, the sun refuses its light; the earth shakes to its very foundations, the universe seems ready to fall back again into its original nothingness;—He comes forth victorious from the grave, and, as He had foretold, the whole world assumes a new face. The God who was born in a stable, and died upon a gibbet, receives incense from the whole world; and at the end of eighteen hundred years, He alone is adored by every civilized people, He, alone extends His empire every day still further into every remote and barbarous country. All these miracles have begun here at Bethlehem; they are the fruit of this manger, of these rags, of this abject and humiliating birth, whose mystery, dear brethren, we celebrate to-day. And must we not recognize the greatness of God in beholding such trifling means attended by such stupendous effects?

If our divine Lord had appeared under the form of a powerful king or of a philosopher or sage, we would have seen His glory, it is true; but in our eyes, it should necessarily be but the glory of man. We would have ascribed His most wonderful success either to the valor of His armies or to the superiority of His learning and talents. If He had come, on the other hand, environed by heavenly legions, who would have executed His commands and accompanied Him at every step, we would have also seen His glory; but it would be a glory which He shared with the Angels, and some portion of which He would even seem to owe to their assistance. If He had come down in all the splendor of the Divinity, attended by thunder and lightning, as upon Sinai: or encircled with His own light, and eclipsing the rays of the sun, as upon Thabor,—we would have seen His own glory, it is true, the glory which is peculiar to Him alone, but beholding Him thus display, as it were, His undiminished majesty, we might, perhaps, suppose that He stood in need of all His splendor and strength to dazzle and subdue mankind. But when He comes to make a conquest of the world, and casts away, so to speak, all His arms, divests Himself of all His splendor, and strips Himself, to a certain extent, even of Himself; when He humbles Himself to the depths of infirmity, even to the annihilation of feeble and speechless childhood; when He descends to the ignominy of a stable; confines Himself in a manger; is enveloped in swaddling-

clothes; when, after all this, He triumphs over the united powers of earth and hell, overthrows the empire of idolatry, and causes Himself to be everywhere recognized as the true God of the universe, does He not manifest, in an inexpressible and divine manner, the incommunicable glory of Him whose very weakness, according to St. Paul, is stronger than all creatures, and whose humiliations are above all dignities? "We have seen His glory"

II. Jesus came down from heaven upon earth to reform the vices of men and to remove their errors; now, all the vices and all the errors of men arise from three great sources: Pride, voluptuousness, and the insatiable thirst after riches. What has been done by all those famous philosophers, who, from age to age, have exhibited themselves as the masters of wisdom and the teachers of virtue, what has been done, I repeat, by those mighty sages to close up those three poisoned springs, to heal those three mortal disorders of the human heart? Nothing. Their false maxims, and their seductive examples, had even aggravated the disorders to which their empty-sounding philosophy could apply no remedy. At length the true Teacher of nations comes. But how shall He accomplish what so many men, celebrated for their science and talents, have tried in vain to effect? Perhaps, to undertake so great a work He will, at least, wait until He attains the ordinary maturity of age and reason; perhaps He will prepare Himself by long study and profound meditations, and then seek some vast theatre, in which He may proudly display the treasures of His learning and the victorious energy of His eloquence? Ah! such would have been the means and wisdom of man. But consider, my brethren, the means and the wisdom of God. He begins to instruct mankind at His very birth; His school is a stable, His chair is a manger, His lessons are His tears, His sufferings, His humiliations, His nakedness, His silence itself. How powerful, how efficacious are these instructions!

I. In the first place observe how they correct *pride*. Man was intoxicated with a false notion of his own excellence. Having fallen, by his own prevarication, from the exalted rank, in which the goodness of the Creator had placed him, he preserved nothing of his original dignity but an unjustifiable esteem of himself, and a criminal desire of elevation and greatness. He gloried in his reason, and in the power which it gave him over the beings by which he was surrounded, instead of blushing at the vices which had degraded him almost below the level of the brute. Deprived of true glory, which he had forfeited together with his innocence, he was on that account only the more desirous of that false glory which enervates and corrupts the heart. He could not endure either a master or a rival. He had even carried his audacity and

maeness to such a degree as to make himself equal to God, and to place the corruptible image of man upon the altar, instead of the immortal God. How, then, was it possible to control such a blind and unbridled passion? How could he be taught to know himself, and be forced to despise himself? Conceive, if you can, any means more powerful to effect this end than the spectacle which is presented to us at Bethlehem. Look at this wonderful annihilation of the Saviour in His cradle, and listen to what His very silence proclaims to you: "O man, you think yourself to be something great,—see, nevertheless, how profoundly I must humble myself to come near you. You pride yourself upon your reason, and your inclinations make you so closely resemble the brute creation that, as I wish to make Myself like to you, it is in the dwelling-place of mean animals I, the incarnate God, am born. You glory in your learning and wisdom, and because there is nothing in you but ignorance and folly, when the Eternal Wisdom assumes your nature, He must appear in the form of silent and senseless childhood. Miserable slave of passion, you think yourself free, and My limbs are bound with these swaddling-clothes, solely to represent the ignominious fetters, in which your soul is held captive!" It is thus the Manger teaches proud man not only to humble himself, but even to esteem and cherish humiliation itself. No other instruction could impart so sublime a truth.

2. Pleasure is the mistress and idol of this world; the anxiety and energy of all creatures are directed to its attainment. Man desires pleasure at any price; he strives to make every creature furnish it to him; he seeks it by every means in his power; he immolates his conscience before it every day; he often sacrifices his repose, his honor, and even his very life, to the pursuit of it; in his blindness, he regards it as his sovereign good. But if he pauses to contemplate the manger of the divine Infant, must he not say to himself: This is my Saviour, my Model, my Master, and my God. He was born in pain, and shall I exist for no other purpose but the indulgence of pleasure? He was laid upon the straw of a stable, and can I repose only on the couch of voluptuous ease? Miserable rags have been His only covering, and shall I, His creature, be clothed in naught save delicate and sumptuous garments? His innocent flesh has been exposed, almost without protection, to the piercing blast of the severest winter, and my criminal flesh will not consent to endure the most trifling mortification? It must, therefore, be true, that pleasure is a fatal poison, since He, my Incarnate God, rejects it so utterly. It must, therefore, be true that the mortification of the senses is a salutary remedy for the disorder of our souls since, in order to give us the example, my Saviour begins to practise it as soon as He begins to live. Worldlings, therefore, deceive themselves, when they say, that time is given to us only for enjoyment, and that the

first years of life, at least, ought to be spent in joy and pleasure; for our Redeemer has made no distinction of this sort in His own case; the beginning as well as the end of His days, has been consecrated to austerity and tears. Such are the sentiments inspired by the mere sight of the cradle of Jesus Christ, sentiments which could never be inspired by all the subtle reasonings, or all the eloquent declamations of human philosophy.

3. But is this spectacle, which is so efficacious against pride and the pursuit of pleasure, less destructive of avarice, the third source of the misfortunes and crimes of mankind? Who could refrain from seeing the clearest condemnation, a sort of reprobation of riches,—in all those signs of poverty and indigence which surround the Infant Saviour? When that God, to whom all things belong, came down upon earth to dwell in the midst of us, He preferred the most complete destitution, the most extreme poverty and misery, to all the splendors of opulence and fortune; must it not then be inferred from such a fact, that the goods which He rejects and despises, are not real goods, that all our filthy treasures deserve nothing but contempt? What discourse could inculcate this so effectually as such an example? And when this selfsame God afterwards pronounced that admirable maxim: “Blessed are the poor;” when He added that terrible threat: “Woe unto you, rich men,” what did He teach but what His birth had inculcated in an equally emphatic manner; what the stable, the manger, and the swaddling-clothes had already distinctly proclaimed?

III. In conclusion I shall briefly show that this birth of Jesus Christ, which was so humble and abject, and which, as we have seen, was best adapted to the greatness and wisdom of the Man-God was also that which was most worthy of His goodness. Mercy and love were chiefly what brought down the Word of God upon earth. It was, therefore, fitting that He should make His entry upon this earth in the manner and condition which most strikingly manifested His goodness towards men. And this is precisely what He has done by His humble birth at Bethlehem, for

1. What could be more conformable to His goodness than to be born of a mortal mother and to be in the state of childhood? If we were guided by human notions, it might perhaps, appear to be more consistent with the dignity of the *Word made flesh*, to receive a body formed by the hands of God, at once, like that of the first Adam, and to come into the world as *he* came, in the state of a perfect man; but if such had been the birth of the God-Man, He would not have contracted an intimate and indissoluble union with our nature; He would have resem-

bled us, certainly, but He would have remained a stranger to our blood and our race, and we could not, with propriety, style ourselves His co-heirs and His brethren. Whereas, by being born of a daughter of Adam, He wished to be bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; He wished to identify Himself with us, to belong, really, to the human family. Could He carry His goodness farther? Hence, He has delighted to style Himself not simply man, but (by a much more affecting expression), the *Son of Man*, thus indicating that He recognized our sires as His own, and that His origin, according to the flesh, was the same as ours. This is what enraptured the prophet, and made him exclaim with so much joy and emotion that *a Son was given to us*, because His human generation made this precious Scion, as it were, the fruit of the same womb with ourselves.

2. The goodness of the Man-God required that He should be born in poverty and suffering. Such a birth was due to His condition as the universal solace of the afflicted. The prophets had foretold that He should heal all the wounds of our hearts, that He should wipe away every tear, and open His bosom to all the unfortunate. Now, is any one well fitted to alleviate those sorrows to which he, himself, remains a stranger? Is it to the great and prosperous of this world that the poor and unfortunate will have recourse for a genuine sympathy with their misfortunes? If a man would effectually alleviate sorrow, must he not share it, or first experience it himself? This was the opinion of the Apostle, for, speaking of our Saviour, he says: "We have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities," and he goes on to state that there is not one of our afflictions which our Lord has not learned by His own experience, with the exception of sin, which He was incapable of committing. This merciful High-priest was, therefore, well qualified to invite all the afflicted to approach Him, saying to them with sympathetic love: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

3. The last obligation which His goodness imposed upon the Incarnate Word was to be born, not in glory, but humiliation; and why? For the encouragement of pusillanimous souls, and chiefly of sinners moved by the desire of conversion. The majesty of God is imposing and awful. His sanctity amazes us, His justice alarms us, His greatness overwhelms us. If, then, the God-Man had maintained His privileges and His natural dignity, by appearances consistent with them, no mortal man could dare to approach Him. Instead of taking refuge in His bosom, we would fly from His presence; and, like the Israelites, at the foot of Mount Sinai, we would fear to cast a glance towards Him, lest sudden death should be the punishment of our temerity. But He wished to

live in close familiarity with us, to dwell in temples built by our own hands; there He wished to receive our homage at every moment, to admit us to His table, and to become Himself the nourishment and life of our souls. But, lest we should be terrified by such favors, it was necessary that He should encourage us by the excess of His humiliations, and that He should descend so low that we could have no cause to imagine that He despised our misery.

Let, then, *the proud and haughty* humble their self-conceit before the divine greatness which endures so many humiliations. Let the *wise and prudent of this world* abjure their vain science, and adore the holy and adorable foolishness of the Infancy of a God. Let *afflicted hearts and penitent souls* derive solid consolation from the sufferings of their Saviour by mingling their tears with His. Let us all hasten to Bethlehem, dear brethren following the footsteps of those holy shepherds who were the first to render their homage to the infant Messiah,—that we may return, as they did, replenished with a holy joy, and filled with love and gratitude; and that, for the time to come, we may consecrate our whole lives to His glory and service, and, after death, may be permitted to praise Him for all eternity in His heavenly kingdom. Amen.

McCARTHY S. J.

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## CHRISTMAS DAY.

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*"I announce to you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour."—Luke, ii. 10, 11.*

This happy announcement, which was once made so gladly by an Angel in the silence of midnight, is now made with equal gladness by the Church in the fullness of midday, not on the mountains, but in the midst of every city of the Christian world. For, to the Church of God, dear brethren, the Birth of our dear Lord is not an event of antiquity,—long past and long gone by, to be numbered amongst the occurrences of buried ages. What St. Paul said, centuries ago, our holy Church ever continues to say: "Jesus Christ yesterday, and to-day, and the same forever."—*Hebr.*, xiii. 8. His is not an existence destined for a limited time. He is for all time,—the earliest and the latest. He was born not only for those living upon the earth when the Angels sang their song above His crib in the ruined stable, but for those also who had gone before, as well as for those who were yet to come. Abraham, two thousand years before, saw the day of Christ and was glad; the Patriarchs and Prophets looked forward joyfully to an event which was pregnant with

hopes of salvation for them; and with equal joy, we, in our day, look back to that prelude of Redemption which was to be to every faithful soul a never-failing source of happiness. Yes, the glad tidings of the angel still echo throughout the world; and the Church takes up the heavenly message and makes it still her own. It is she who proclaims, to-day, what for eighteen hundred years she has never ceased to proclaim on every recurrence of this great solemnity: "I announce to you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour." Let me then invite you, dear Christian, to hearken to this welcome summons of great joy. It certainly can never be a difficult or distasteful duty. We shall see what are the greatness and extent of this joy,

*I. In the fact, and  
II. In its commemoration*

I. The Birth of Christ, in its fact, was a cause of universal joy; a joy diffused not only over all the masses of mankind; but mounting up even to the abode of the God-head in heaven.

i. *To the Eternal Father it was an event of exceeding joy;* for He that is born is His Only-begotten Son, dwelling in His bosom, and proceeding from Him for all eternity. The voice which was heard by men, at His Baptism and at His Transfiguration, must have found expression, also, at His Birth: His Mother and the angels must have distinctly heard it: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—*Matth.*, iii. 17,—*xvii.* 5. In His Wisdom and Goodness, the Father had designed and decreed from the beginning that His own divine Son should become Man, and be born of a woman; and what His Wisdom and Goodness had thus decreed, His Power now executes. Therefore He rejoices because His sovereign will has been accomplished. And *to the Son* Himself what an occasion of joy is this! He rejoices as a giant running His course; He commences, with a heart full of happiness, that work of love which always delighted Him,—the fulfillment of His heavenly Father's will. The Incarnate Word delights to enter the world; and though He is so poorly welcomed by His creatures, He congratulates Himself upon His arrival among them, and at once begins to dispense His graces and blessings. He rejoices even in His poverty by willingly accepting it; it is His own choice and preference. He is obeying His Father: therefore He rejoices. He is honoring His Immaculate Mother: therefore He looks up into her sweet face with delight. He is purchasing the salvation and the happiness of immortal souls; therefore He rejoices. As the Apostles rejoiced when they went away suffer-

ing from the tribunals of their judges; rejoiced, because they were considered worthy to endure reproach for the name of Jesus; so, at His Birth, He, for whom this name was in store rejoiced in all the sufferings which surrounded Him, rejoiced at His entrance into a world which He was determined to redeem by suffering.

2. The Holy Ghost rejoices in the appearance of the Incarnate Word among men, because He sees in this event the result of His own coöperation with the Virgin Mother. That the Immaculate Virgin was really the Spouse of the Divine Spirit we learn from the Inspired Text itself; for when Mary, (anxious for the preservation of her virginity, which she would not have sacrificed even for the honor of such a glorious Maternity,) asked of the angel Gabriel: "How can this be done?"—the angel of God made answer: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."—*Luke*, i. 35. As at the Baptism of Christ when the Eternal Father expressed His complacency in His divine Son, the Spirit of God descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove, even so may we imagine that same divine Spirit hovering as a dove above the crib of Bethlehem, and brooding with joy over the Christ-Child and His sinless Mother. And thus does the Birth of Him, whose praises the Angels sung, give joy to the Most Blessed Trinity,—"Glory to God in the highest."

3. But it is to *the whole of mankind, to all the people*, (as the good angel declares to the watchful shepherds), that this great day is a cause of joy. First and foremost amongst the children of men stands the holy and Immaculate Virgin, the happy, privileged Mother, through whom He enters incarnate into this world. No joy of creatures can equal hers. It stands alone. It is a mother's joy. He was born for all, but especially for her, upon whom has now come down the glory and the joy of an exceptional Maternity. Her hours of anxiety have passed away, and she rejoices because a Man is born into the world. These, you remember, were our Lord's own words when He defined the peculiar felicity of a mother's joy. As Adam rejoiced over the created Eve, formed, as she was, from his own substance, and, looking upon her, said: "This now is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh," so may we imagine Mary looking upon her own beloved Son in the stable of Bethlehem, and, in the fullness of her joy, addressing to Him these tender words. She had been appointed to reverse the disastrous work of Eve, and, through Mary, the Woman now says to the Man, what the first man once said to the first woman. And her good and faithful husband Joseph participates in her joy; Mary and her chaste spouse are both filled with delight as they gaze in a spirit of wondering admiration upon Him, "on whom the Angels long to look."

4. Angels? yes, Angels are there; and, full of heavenly rapture, they also share in the joy of this wonderful day. If they bring tidings of great joy to all the people, they do not and cannot exclude themselves from a share in that felicity. They love mankind too sincerely not to take part in a happiness which concerns those creatures of God, to whom they are appointed as ministering spirits. The mystery concerns them also, though not so directly as it concerns man; for the Eternal Word assumed not the nature of an angel, but that other nature a little lower than the Angels.—*Heb.*, i. 14. The Word was made Flesh. It was belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God, and submission to that mystery, which confirmed the good Angels in glory; and, therefore, even for their own sakes the heavenly spirits rejoice. Behold them, dear brethren,—hearken to them in their glad chorus, singing the praises of their Lord and our Lord! They are the first Apostles and Evangelists of this joyful event; for the “*Gloria in excelsis*,” first sung by them upon the blessed, Christmas Eve, is fittingly called the Angelical Hymn. It is now no longer the ancient prophets, it is the Angels, who announce, not an event that is yet to come when a “a Virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son,”—but an event that is already accomplished, because this day is born a Saviour. “If there is joy in heaven before the Angels of God over one sinner that doth penance,” (*Luke*, xv. 7), what great joy must there not be before the celestial choirs, not over one penitent alone, but over the whole body of penitents reconciled to their God !

5. But especially to mankind, to all the people, is this proclaimed a day of joy. It is *to us* that a Saviour is born; and as the Creed tells us “it was for us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” What universal joy, on many accounts, does this great fact bring into the world! Sin, with its harsh and melancholy pressure, is removed, and grace begins its reign upon earth. “The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men.” We have been reconciled to God, and peace is now made with heaven; because the Prince of Peace has become one of us. How can heaven look down upon earth except in love, when earth is now blessed with such a precious gift? We are exalted in dignity; for in the same proportion as the Incarnate Word has humbled Himself by becoming man, He has raised up man to a level with Himself. Therefore St. Peter uses an expression from which we, dear brethren, would be inclined to shrink, which we could scarcely have dared to use of ourselves, *viz.*: that, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we are made partakers of the divine nature. Is not the event of this day one of joy, then, to all the people? Saints rejoice because this day has purchased for them grace and per-

severance. Sinners rejoice, because it has gained for them repentance and pardon.

II. The event which we solemnize to day was intimately associated with joy, and in like manner, is not its commemoration necessarily one of joy? The anniversary of any great event in the history of a country is never forgotten, but the occurrence itself is made to live again as, year after year, it is celebrated by a proud and grateful people. Just think of the Fourth of July. Will that day ever be forgotten by the American people? When, in the Old Testament, the command was given to the Israelites to commemorate each year with great joy, until the end of time, the event of their liberation from the bondage of Egypt, a principle was affirmed which nations illustrate, when they commemorate each year the victories by which they have conquered oppressors or achieved their independence. What a conquest does not this day commemorate, and why should not the commemoration be associated with glory and joy? The mystery of the Incarnation has not been exhausted of its blessings: they are as abundant and as efficacious now, as upon the very day when the angel proclaimed joy to all the people.

The Church, therefore, rejoices on this festival, and commands us to join with her in her spirit of gladness. Advent, the season of penance and of watching, has passed, and we are now reaping the fruit for which we labored during those four weeks of prayerful self-denial. We were then living over again the four thousand years of gloom, when hope deferred was sickening the souls of men; and when the children of Adam were longing in painful suspense for a blessing which was still kept out of their reach. Now it is no longer deferred: it is in our possession, and, consequently, we have a right to rejoice. If, as we have seen, the Birth of the Son of God gave joy to the Eternal Father, to the Son Himself, as well as to the Holy Ghost,—the Church, because she is the Church of God and the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost, must rejoice, and be in harmony with her Founder. She represents Almighty God upon earth, and His cause is entrusted to her keeping. Whatever advances this cause occasions joy to her; and therefore, on account of this increase to the glory of her God, she is filled with joy. Then, again, her doctrine of the Communion of Saints, which with holy Church is so practical a reality, makes her a partaker of the joy of the Virgin Mother, of the happy St. Joseph, of the rapturous choir of the Angels. She, at least, is never forgetful of the honor due to the ever-blessed Mother of the Incarnate Word: zealously and solidly she defends that honor; and she cannot penetrate into the stable of Bethlehem without seeing what the shepherds and kings saw of old when they made their way thither,—*Jesus, with Mary, His Mother.* That grand

old Church has not, it is true, yet entered upon her future triumphant state; but she already finds herself in company with many *thousands of Angels and the spirits of the just made perfect* who are the blissful attendants of the Church of the First-born among nations. Certainly, a festival like this revives for her all these delightful associations; and therefore it is that the tone of her joy to-day is so preëminently pure and exalted. And what good reason has she not to rejoice, to-day, over her own visible members here below! She knows that all her children must be influenced by the spirit of this Festival; and since it is now an occasion of blessing to them, therefore, it is a cause of joy to her. It was especially for men that the mystery was effected, and it is especially for men that its annual commemoration is solemnized. We feel to-day that heaven is brought closer to us. Angels, who inhabit that blessed kingdom, are mingling their songs with ours; they are leading our chorus to-day, and it is not hard for us to rejoice when we become one spirit with the celestial choirs. So many graces and blessings are being showered down upon us, that we cannot help rejoicing. And particularly if in holy Communion we have ourselves become a Bethlehem, a house of bread, if He that is the living Bread that has come down from heaven, has taken up His abode within us, Angels are, doubtless, at this moment singing around us also, and helping us to more fervent and loving acts of thanksgiving and praise. It is, then, a day of universal joy, and the message of the Angel has not been received in vain.

And shall there be an exception to all this happiness? What about the poor, dear Christians? Are they also to rejoice? There is, indeed, about this festival much to comfort them and make them rejoice. Do they not see how their own state was privileged in Bethlehem? How He that was born, there in the stable, was born poor, of poor, parents; and that His first earthly adorers were of the class of the poor the hard-working, the watchful mountain-shepherds? There is, then, much to make them rejoice, when they contemplate the details, and study the lessons of this solemnity. But that is not the only question which affects their state upon this day. You, who are not poor, what are *you* to do in order to contribute to the joy of the destitute on this festival of universal joy? If you make these days occasion of earthly rejoicing, of social meetings, of conviviality; if you do nothing to contribute to the wants of the poor, to whom this is, oftentimes, a season of unusual suffering and privation, and who feel their wants all the more, when they see others in a state of unusual rejoicing, are you not adding to their sufferings, instead of trying to alleviate them? Do deeds of charity in their behalf, send them words of comfort; lay aside something to be consecrated to the use of the poor. Allow your clergy to go among them with your gifts; or, better still, bear them yourselves, and say to them: "I announce to you tidings of great joy, for this is your own special festival, and

amongst you has the Saviour been born." View in the persons of the poor, the sacred Humanity of Him who has to-day assumed our nature. Let not your sympathy with them be that of sentiment only, but let it be real and efficacious. Do not tell them, in their hunger, in their cold and naked state, to be warmed and filled and comforted; but go to them in person, and with true Christian charity help to relieve their sufferings. Remember that the Divine Child who is born to-day says: "*Whatever you do to the poor, you do to Me.*" Be assured, then, that if you sincerely wish to gain the full blessings of this happy solemnity, and to taste a joy, pure, and worthy of such a day, you can secure all that you desire for yourself by your acts of charity to these favorites of heaven. The Child Jesus, poor and outcast, will be a special Friend and Saviour to those, who, in their turn, have made themselves friends and saviours of the poor. These are the men of good will, to whom the angels proclaim peace, to-day; and unto these will be given that everlasting joy and peace, the fruit of the blessing inaugurated by the Incarnation and Birth of the Prince of Peace.

J. N. SWEENEY. O. S. B.

## SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

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### ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A BAD DEATH.

*“Behold, this child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.—Luke 2: 34.*

Has not this prophecy been fulfilled to the very letter? The Infant Jesus was a mark of contradiction first to Herod the king; then, throughout his entire life on earth, he was a mark of contradiction to his own people, and finally ever since his death, Christ Crucified has been a mark of contradiction to the bad Catholic as well as to the heretic; for we cannot deny that he is contradicted by many who pretend and profess to be his followers. Christ Crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, and many of the believers are scandalized in him. “Behold, this Child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.” Many believe in him and obey him, and by their belief in Christ, and their obedience to him are saved; behold, this Child is set for their resurrection. But many neither believe in him, nor obey him; and, behold, again, this Child is set for their ruin. God wills, indeed, all men to be saved; he enlightens every one who comes into this world; but because the proud are scandalized by his humility—because the wicked refuse to accept the doctrine of Christ or to live according to its precepts, it follows that this Child is set for their ruin. Yea, set for the ruin of many; many who will die in their sins and perish eternally. We must all fear lest such a lot should befall us. There is no one who has not occasion to consider: “Perhaps this Child is set for my ruin.” It is really expedient to ponder, at times, this terrible supposition; for he who dreads an evil, takes every precaution against it, (to be forewarned is to be forearmed;) and he who is always on his guard, has good reason to hope that he may escape the threatened calamity. It is not my intention to diminish this salutary fear in you; on the contrary, I shall use every exertion to preserve, and, if possible, increase it. Hear, then, the reasons, which are calculated to strike every one of us with fear and trembling.

- I. Any one of the faithful may die unrepentant.*
- II. Many of the faithful die unrepentant, and*
- III. It is very probable that the greater part of the adult faithful die ill.*

I. We wrong our souls when we delude them with a security which does not exist. There is no one in the whole world, who can say with certainty: "I will die a good death, and go straight to heaven." The innocent and just man cannot say it, even though he may have preserved the purity of his morals unspotted amidst the dangers of a corrupt world; the sincere penitent cannot say it, even though he does rigorous penance for sins of which he has already repented; for, at any moment, the just man may fall from his righteousness, and the penitent may relapse into his sins—and both may die impenitent. I do not doubt, my dear brethren, that your resolution to avoid sin, is strong, but the strength of your resolution does not eradicate the innate weakness of your nature. We cannot say that we shall be faithful to-morrow, because we have been faithful to-day. Inborn in the children of earth, there is an evil concupiscence which makes the flesh rebel against the spirit; there is a most violent propensity to evil, a host of unruly passions which are never entirely subdued, but are ever ready to disturb the peace of the heart—how then can we say with certainty, that we shall not succumb in the struggle, and fall into sin? How easy is it for the understanding, which often deceives itself, to mistake the wrong for the right! how easy for the will which is so weak and unstable, to deviate from the path of godliness! We are frail as a reed, unsteady as a leaf, and changeable as the weather; what constancy, what perseverance in virtue can we promise then ourselves?

There are enemies on all sides of us; enemies within us, our treacherous passions; enemies without us, the spirit of darkness and his evil angels; enemies around us, the wicked world and its alluring emissaries; and all these enemies labor hard to deprive us of the treasure of grace which we carry in a frail, earthen vessel, liable to be broken, when we least expect it. Does not all nature seem conspired to ruin us? What place is there in which there is no danger? When is the time which is devoid of scandals? When we least think of it, we are provoked to anger by the most trifling cause. How many are the rocks on which we may suffer shipwreck, almost without knowing it! How many are led astray by the false maxims of the world! Indeed, the whole world is steeped in wickedness and covered with snares; no step is without danger, and unless we use the most vigilant precaution, we shall be entangled and lost. The devil assails with the greatest violence that side of the heart which he knows to be the weakest; and seeing that he can do nothing by violence, he endeavors by stratagem to lead us into his snares, transforming himself for that purpose into an angel of light. Who, then, can be without fear of eternal ruin in the midst of so many dangers? who can say with certainty, "There is no danger for me, I am entirely safe and secure"?

It is true, God assists us with his grace to battle against the corrupt inclinations of the heart, the alluring charms of the world, and the violent temptations of the devil; I know this, and blessed are we, if we avail our-

selves of this succor; but, notwithstanding the grace which he proffers, how often have we not to bewail the most dishonorable defeats? The grace of God was not wanting to St. Peter, and yet he fell. David, a man according to the heart of God, yielded to temptation, and committed murder and adultery. Judas, an apostle, was lost in the school of Christ. Our first parents certainly had not to deplore their want of grace; on the contrary, grace found in them no opposition on the part of rebellious concupiscence, and yet they when tempted, fell from their high estate. Even the angels in heaven sinned, though their nature was free from the burden of the flesh, and endowed with many other glorious prerogatives. Considering all this, who will say that he need not fear? The strongest trees are shaken and thrown down by a sudden blast after having withstood for centuries the most violent storms, and we, weak reeds that we are, will we say that there is no danger for us?

It is, indeed, a great consolation for us, if we can say with St. Paul: "I am not conscious to myself of anything," but even upon this consoling consciousness we cannot base the certainty of a happy death; for the Apostle goes on to tell us: "Yet I am not hereby justified. I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away." St. Paul in fear of becoming a cast-away! What shall we say of ourselves, who are so lacking in the virtues and perfection of St. Paul? Have we not all reason to fear the horrors of an unhappy death? But if we really possess this holy and salutary fear of the Apostle, how do we show it? St. Paul manifested his fear by chastising his body, and bringing it into subjection. Do we chastise our bodies? Do we bring them into subjection? Ah, if persevering bodily austerity is the index of a wholesome fear of an unhappy death, we must confess that this fear is to be found only with the minority; for the generality of Christians seem to exist solely for sensual enjoyments, and their criminal flesh shrinks from the most trifling mortifications. A little sprinkling of rain, a light snow or frost, will furnish them an excuse for not hearing Mass on Sundays and Holidays. Do they fear becoming castaways? Ah! it is no proof of wisdom to say with the lips that you fear an unhappy death; for if you really fear that irreparable calamity, and yet make no preparation against it, you must be mad.

II. We should fear a bad death because many of the faithful actually die unrepentant. Death is the gate through which man passes into eternity; a good death leads to a happy eternity, a bad death, to endless misery. Now, it is certain, beyond doubt, that many pass through this second gate into eternity. Hear what Christ says: "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat." Just look at the life of the generality of Christians, and you can easily judge for yourselves how they will

die. Do not many of them lead bad lives? Consider every condition of age and sex, and then tell me, if you do not find more sinners than just and good people? How many fathers and mothers neglect to instruct their children in the principles of religion, and present, instead, to their households, examples of irreligion and impiety? How many sons and daughters know nothing of obedience and submission to their parents? How many give way to slander and detraction, to cursing and swearing? How many are addicted to drunkenness and impurity? Among business-people, are there not in many stores more lies told than goods sold? In many houses, do not the very walls resound with curses, imprecations, and blasphemies? How many are ruined by anger, how many are blinded by pride, how many are destroyed by drunkenness, how many defiled with impurity? Was there ever a time when sin and iniquity of every description were more prevalent than in our days? Peace and justice, instead of kissing each other, have left the land; cursing and lying, homicide, theft, and adultery have overflowed the earth. Now, as there are so many who lead bad lives, must we not draw the unavoidable conclusion that many also make a bad, unholy, and unhappy end? He that lives ill, dies ill; this is a truth taught by the Sacred Scriptures, and corroborated by daily experience.

Perhaps you will say: There are many sins committed, but there are also many confessions; and if the number of sinners is great, the number of penitents is, also, great. True, a sincere and persevering penance is the only plank of safety which can bring the sinner out of the immense ocean of sin into the harbor of a happy eternity, but can that be called a sincere repentance which has no earnest and firm resolution to avoid sin? or, which, (according to its own statement,) undertakes an impossibility, namely, to avoid sin without avoiding the occasion of sin? Again, can you call it a sincere repentance when sinners instead of accusing themselves of their crimes and offences, excuse, color, palliate, extenuate, and even conceal them in confession? And is not the repentance of most Christians who thus approach the tribunal of penance, of this doubtful order? I assure you, it is easier to find an innocent person who never committed a mortal sin, than to find a true Gospel-penitent, who really does penance for his past sins. But, my dear brethren, even if I grant you that the repentance of many is sincere for the time being, tell me frankly, is it also persevering? Do not many rise from their sins, only to fall back into them again? Do they not promise much and perform little? Yes, they go one week to confession, and the next, they return, like the dogs, to their vomit. They spend a few Sundays with God, but the rest they spend with the devil. And who could be insane enough to base the hope of a good death upon such a so-called repentance?

Where is our fear? St. Ephrem says: "If there were but one, who should die ill, I would fear that I was that unfortunate being," but we

know that not only one but many will die ill, and we have no fear of being one of that multitude? Indeed, there are but few that fear an unhappy end. They have no time to think of death, because they think of nothing but money and pleasures, lands and houses, and the perishable things of this world. In their presence, no one is permitted to speak of prayer and the Sacraments; the mere mention of penance and mortification strikes terror into their hearts; and, nevertheless, they live in as strong a conviction of a happy death, as if they had had a revelation from heaven to that effect. Whence arises this accursed security? When Christ said to his Apostles, at the Last Supper, that one of them would betray him, the eleven, who were innocent, were filled with terror and began to ask him one after another: "Is it I, O Lord?" Am I that malefactor and son of perdition? Oh! that the same effects were produced in your hearts, my brethren, by that fear and terror with which the consideration of the great multitude of the lost must inspire us! Let us ask ourselves whether we are of the number of those who will die ill; and then, pausing to listen to the unerring testimony of conscience, let us turn to God and say to him: Is it I, O Lord? Will I be one of the vast multitude who die in enmity with thee, one of the unhappy myriads who are lost for ever? Let us beseech him at the same time to assist us with his grace, to enable us faithfully to discharge our duties, and persevere in doing penance all the days of our lives, to the end that we may avert from ourselves such an irreparable evil.

III. It is very probable, as I have said, my brethren, that the greater number of adults die unrepentant. According to the Apostle, all the events recorded in the Old Testament were only figures and types by which God permitted the Israelites to behold under the shadow of things present, the substance of other things which were yet to come. "All these things happened to them in figure." Now, if this be so, I desire to know what conclusion you draw from the fact that at the general Deluge only eight persons were saved; at the conflagration of Sodom, only two; and at the destruction of Jericho, the inmates of but one solitary house? I desire to know why it was that out of the sixty thousand men who left Egypt with Moses, only two entered the Land of Promise? What else do we see in this alarming minority but the small number of the elect? More Christians are lost than saved. When Christ was asked: "Are they few that are saved?" He said no more than this: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate." It would seem, at first sight, as if his answer (we speak with all reverence), was not apposite to the question, but it was; by these words he would give us to understand that but few souls are saved; for at another time he said: "How narrow is the gate and strait the way that leads to life, and few there are that find it." And again: "Wide is the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat." What can be more ex-

plicit? And what shall we say of that terrible sentence which he twice pronounced: "Many are called, but few are chosen?" What does it mean but that many are invited to the heavenly banquet of eternal life but that human weakness and malice do not suffer them to partake of it? What else can it mean but that many die in their sins and perish eternally?

Indeed, if we consider the duties and obligations of religion, which are neither light nor few, we see that but very few Christians fulfil them strictly and exactly. The Gospel requires of us to deny ourselves, to mortify our senses, to despise the world with its pride and pomp; to detest sin more than any other evil, to love God above all, and our neighbor as ourselves for God's sake; to forgive injuries and offences, and to love our enemies; to live in innocence; to do violence to ourselves, and to merit heaven by hard fighting amidst the hardships of a spiritual camp. These things are not easy, they are the Way of the Cross. This Gospel is not pleasant, it is no holiday sport. Now, tell me, do you find many who discharge all these duties and obligations to the letter? You are not ignorant that he who transgresses in one point, is become guilty of all, and that the observance of the other commandments will avail him nothing to salvation. And do not most Christians transgress one or the other of the commandments? Do not many Christians live according to the maxims of the world? Do they not do what they see others do, and not what God wills? Do they not give free scope to their passions? Can we then wonder that, as there are but few faithful servants of God, few only will be saved?

And do you know why it appears strange to us, my brethren, that there should be but few who end their lives in a holy manner? Because we generally judge from what we see, from outward appearances. But the appearance is deceitful. We see many receive the Sacraments, the confessinals are always besieged by an army of penitents; but we do not consider that the reception of the Sacraments is, too often, alas! not followed by an amendment of life. The best sign of a good confession is the amendment of life. We see many crowding to listen to the word of God, but how few are there who reap any benefit from it? We see many attend to their prayers and go to church on Sundays and Holydays, because it is customary or because if they remained at home, time would hang heavily on their hands. Such Christians are not in earnest about what they do; they are among the many who are called, but not among the few chosen.

And yet, O great and immortal God! (some will exclaim:) Christ has not shed his blood for a few, but for all mankind. Heaven has not been made only for a few; there are many who receive the rites of the Church in their last sickness. It is true, Christ shed his blood for all mankind, but as it is not derogatory to his blood that not all are saved, so no reproach is cast upon it, that only a few are saved. It is true that Heaven

has not been made for a few only, but it is equally true, that only a few enter it, because there are only a few, that merit it by complying with the conditions upon which alone it can be gained. Many, indeed, receive the last Sacraments on their death-bed, but not all who appear to die well, really die well. I am more inclined to believe that saint who said: "He that lives ill, will die ill," than all those nice preparations neglected in life, but made in the hour of death. No, let us not deceive ourselves with a false security; we all have reason to fear an unhappy end. The Apostle does not exhort us in vain to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. As only a few die well, nothing remains for us but to strive to be of the number of the few who live well, for as a man lives, so he dies. Do not concern yourselves as to what others do in this matter; how they speak, how they live, and conduct themselves; your only care and business must be to do what the Gospel requires of you, individually, and to do it in spite of the multitude who neglect it. The world may scoff at you, laugh at you, ridicule you, but remember that he laughs best who laughs last. The world despises those whom God honors, and honors those whom he despises. Do not desire nor strive to please the world; if you please the world, you will surely displease God, for the ways and the wisdom of the world are not the ways and the wisdom of God. Try to please God alone; and live in such a manner that you may be considered worthy to be of the number of the chosen few, who by the **narrow gate** enter into the mansions of eternal bliss. Amen.

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### SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

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REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR.

*"This child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many."* *Luke 2: 34.*

For the last time in this year you are assembled in this church. Four days more, and this year also, like so many others which have preceded it, will be gone forever. Important and priceless are the last hours and moments which we spend with a dear friend who is about to depart from us never to return; and we become the more serious and thoughtful, the nearer the moment of our separation approaches. The year 1885 which will terminate in a few days, is like a friend who leaves us, and goes forth from us forevermore. We have lived in it and with it, it has been our constant and faithful attendant on our journey; our associate in joy and grief; our companion in good and evil days. And should not the departing year awake in us feelings similar to those which we experience at the departure of an intimate friend? Should not the last hours of the depart-

ing year be equally as important to us as the last hours which we spend with a departing friend? Should we not in like manner become serious and thoughtful, all the more serious and thoughtful, the closer the year approaches to its end? Only the indifferent and careless can pass from one year to another without serious reflection and meditation; only the thoughtless can finish a certain important period of time, and enter upon an uncertain new one, without being moved to serious reflections by the change. Let us not be of their number; let us not leave this year without some wholesome thoughts and reflections suggested by the Gospel of the day, which exhorts us to correct in the New year the mistakes we have made in the Old; and to grow and become strong in wisdom and grace before God and man, as we advance in age.

The Gospel of this day brings before us Joseph and Mary in the temple of Jerusalem, where, forty days after his birth, they presented and dedicated the Infant Jesus to his Eternal Father. Simeon and Anna were there, that day, in the temple; two persons venerable with age, and renowned for their piety and holy lives. Simeon had received the promise from the Lord that he should not die till he had seen his Saviour-God with his corporal eyes. Scarce had he beheld Joseph and Mary with their Child, than he recognized in him the hope and expectation of Israel. Taking the Babe into his arms, and filled with the spirit of prophecy, he exclaimed: "Behold, this Child is set for the ruin and for the resurrection of Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted." The Mother of Jesus and his holy Foster father wondered at what they thus heard from Simeon of the future destiny and high dignity of their Son. And whilst we contemplate those blessed spouses gazing with wonder and astonishment into the future, so, on our part, let us, at the end of this year, gaze with wonder and astonishment, into the past. A whole year lies behind us, with all its events and vicissitudes, with all its joys and sufferings, with all its troubles and consolations. And if we look back once more upon those departed days, if we recall once more what we have lived to witness and experience, must we not also wonder like Joseph and Mary? and will not the past events excite our astonishment, even as the future events excited theirs?

Yes, we must wonder and return thanks to God, our Protector, who has preserved our health and life unharmed amidst the many dangers that threatened us. We still live, whilst but for him we might have died any day, any hour, any moment of the past year; we still live, and enjoy our existence, whilst many younger and stronger than we, who began the year with us, have departed ere its close. We must be astonished at the greatness and plenitude of God's benefits to us; at so many signal proofs of his love and mercy towards us, which we have not deserved, which often we have not acknowledged, or, if acknowledged, we have abused, or repaid with ingratitude. We must be astonished at the course of the divine

dispensations in our regard. How widely different from our views was God's conduct of affairs! How many things happened contrary to our expectations and wishes; how many events which we deemed hurtful or disadvantageous to us, turned out in the end, true blessings in disguise; how much that seemed fraught with our ruin, was really for our benefit! Because we understood not the ways of him who often leads to light through darkness, we complained in our childish ignorance of many trials for which we have now reason to praise his wisdom and goodness; and confessing our hastiness, we are forced, this hour, to exclaim: "God hath done all things well!"

The life of man extends over seventy, or, at most, eighty years. Simeon and Anna had reached that age, and stood, as it were, at the close of their career. We are at the end of a year, and, consequently, one year nearer to the close of life than we were twelve months ago. Of the seventy or eighty years, which, at most, we can expect to live, one year is gone forever. Nay more, of the ten, twenty, thirty years which are wanting to us to complete the seventy or eighty years of life, one additional year is past, never to return. A new year extends its inviting vista before us. A new year which will be the last, perhaps, we shall ever live to see; possibly, we may live to the end of it; possibly, we may not. We do not know, and we cannot know this; only the Almighty One knows, who has counted our days, before we had an existence; who has power over life and death saying: "Thus far, and no farther." But this much we *do* know: another year is past; we are one year older than we were a year ago; we are one year nearer to the grave; and we know that in ten, twenty, thirty years many of us shall be no more; that in less than a hundred years not one of us here present will be living, but that we shall be then in eternity, either forever happy, or forever miserable.

Nor is this all. The year 1885 is past, indeed, but our works of the year survive in their consequences; they are recorded above, either for or against us. The days of the Old year are gone for ever, so that no trace of them can be found, but our doings of those days are written upon the records of God in characters that can never be effaced. Whatever good or evil we have done; whatever sins we have committed; whatever duties we have omitted; all these, the departed year hath left behind it; all these remain untouched by the tooth of time, and will live and last for ever. Hence, we have not only lived another year, but we have lived it, either for our salvation or our reprobation. Oh! that we might be able to say with Job: "My heart, my conscience reproveth me not in my whole life!" Oh! that we had not to accuse ourselves of so many bad thoughts, sinful desires, and evil deeds during the year! Oh! that all our past days and hours had been spent in the service of God, and were now happily recorded in the Book of Life! But he who says that he has no sin, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. Even the just man falls seven times,—who, therefore,

knows how often we have fallen during the past year? How many times we have been guilty of infidelity to duty, of disobedience to the law of God? How many days we have lived in hatred and enmity with our neighbor? How many months we have been under the influence and dominion of our unruly passions? Oh! when the Apostle says: "Though I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet herein I am not justified; my judge is the Lord, who will bring to light what is hidden, and manifest the thoughts,"—when St. Paul thus declared that he dared not consider himself just, how dare we think ourselves just and irreproachable, who are so far removed from his high state of perfection?

Hence, I think, we all have reason, more or less, at the end of the year, to look back upon our past lives with fear and trembling; we all have reason to cry out to God in humility and contrition of heart: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity!" And: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Yes, a long array of transgressions, of violations or omissions of duty rise before us, and stare us in the face; all these are written down upon the records of God; they will one day testify against us, and, unless we repent, will call down upon us the terrible anathema of an offended Judge: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." "If the wicked do penance for all the sins which he has committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die." (Ezech. 18: 21.) I will not remember his crimes and iniquities which he has committed on account of the justice he fulfills; he shall live, says the Lord.

Wash away, then, your iniquities by penitential tears, and put off the old man. Leave behind you, with the Old year, all hatred and enmity, all rancor and envy, all the excesses of your passions and evil habits. Leave everything that is not good behind you, take nothing but what is pure and holy into the New year; forgive all injuries and offences; retract whatever you have said wrongfully against your neighbor; restore ill-gotten goods; put off the old man with all his works, and put on the new man, created according to Christ, our Lord. Love one another, my brethren, and thus in the fear and the love of God, begin with the New year a new life which shall prove acceptable to God and profitable to yourselves.

Jesus advanced in wisdom, and the grace of God was in him. This is the vocation and destiny of man. As we grow in years, so we must advance in wisdom and every virtue; we must delight in doing the will of God, and the will of God is contained in the commandments. If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Do good and decline from evil. Do this, and thou shalt live.

If the householder knew at what hour the thief would come, he would surely watch and would not suffer his house to be broken into. Be you, then, also, ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will

come. This is the great lesson of vigilance which is perpetually inculcated by our Saviour as our only security against the dreadful calamity of an unprovided death; our only safeguard against all those endless evils which are the unhappy consequences of an unprovided death. Watch and pray. Our Lord, who has mercifully preserved us during the Old year, has, in the meantime, through his angel of Death, knocked at the door of thousands of others who this day twelve months seemed as likely to live as ourselves. Their bodies are now corrupting in their graves, but, oh! where are their poor souls? And where shall *our* bodies be, where shall *our* souls be, a twelve-month hence? Let us, then, be always ready, and work whilst it is day, because we do not know the day nor the hour when the Lord shall come.

Time is short; you will die sooner than you expect. Set your house now in order; and be prepared at any moment for your journey into eternity. The mercy of God has borne with you for many years past, and, notwithstanding all the provocations of your repeated crimes and continual ingratitude, he has brought you again to the beginning of a New year. He is sincerely desirous that now, at least, you should begin a new life,—such a life as may tend by its works of piety and perfection to secure to your souls the true Life which never ends. You have been like the barren fig-tree planted in his vineyard, which, hitherto, has brought forth nothing but leaves, but behold! he is trying you once more in the hope of your doing better for the future; he will continue, yet a little longer, to enrich the soil of your heart by the graces of his divine Word and of his holy Sacraments. But take care to disappoint him no more, by refusing the fruits he expects, of a thorough amendment of life, lest, by an irrevocable sentence, he condemn the barren fig-tree to be cut down at last and cast forever into the fire.

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## NEW YEAR'S DAY.

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### THE END OF MAN.

*“O Lord, make me know my end.”—Ps. 38: 5.*

The year 1885 with all its cares and troubles, with all its pleasures and joys has drifted down the stream of time, never more to return. It is estimated that thirty-two millions of people die every year. How many then have died during the last 1885 years? Sixty thousand three hundred and twenty millions! Where are their souls now? In eternity, either in heaven or in hell. We, too, must die; we must follow them; and follow them soon. One year, one day, will certainly be our last. What our lot will be in the other world, depends altogether upon how we spend our

lives in this. We know that man dies as he lives; that we shall enter into life if we keep the commandments; and that God will render to everyone according to his works.

We have entered to-day upon the year 1886. Many of us have lived thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years. What have we been doing all this time? What have we been striving to attain? Did we think of the end for which we were created? Oh, how seldom! And yet, of all things necessary for man to know, the end for which he came into this world, deserves his first attention. Being a rational creature, he ought to work for a final end in the enjoyment of which he may find his eternal happiness. But he cannot work for this end without a knowledge of it, a knowledge which excites the desire to search for and employ the means of obtaining it. A man who knows not his last end, is like a beast. He regards only things present, things material and sensible, after the manner of the brute creation. In this, he is more miserable than irrational animals, because they find in these exterior objects all the felicity they are capable of, but he finds in them neither repose nor happiness; they are to him but a source of disgust, and of endless misfortunes. From an ignorance of their last end originate all the disorders discernible in the lives of men, since, forgetting that noble and divine end for which their Creator designed them, they are wholly taken up with the pleasures of this mortal life, living upon earth as if they were made for the earth.

What a pitiable sight it would be to see a young prince who was destined by his birth, one day, to wear a crown, doomed by accident or misfortune to be bred among peasants, ignorant of his royal extraction! We would behold him with compassion applying himself wholly to till the earth; confining all his pretensions within the scanty limits of earning a miserable livelihood in the sweat of his brow, without the least thought of the high estate to which he was born. But it is much more deplorable to see men, who are children and heirs of heaven, designed by Almighty God to reign eternally in his Kingdom, living in entire forgetfulness of that end for which they were created; setting all their affections on earthly things, and thus wretchedly depriving themselves of that immense happiness which the bounty of their Creator has prepared for them in heaven.

Reflect then, O man! upon these three questions: What are you? Who made you? And for what end were you made?

*What are you?* You are a creature, endowed with understanding and reason, free will and memory; composed of a body, the structure of which is admirable, and of a reasonable soul, made to the image of God. You are the most perfect of all his visible creatures, the master-piece of his hand, the king of nature.

*Who made you?* You were not made by yourself, for that is impossible; you received from another the being you now enjoy, and from whom have you received it but from him, who created heaven and earth, and

who is the author of all things? It is he who formed you in your mother's womb and brought your soul out of nothing by his power. You are the work of God, and beside the father you have here on earth, you have another in heaven to whom you owe all that you possess.

*And why did God make you?* Have you ever asked yourself this question: "For what end did God place me in this world?" Was it to enjoy the sensual pleasures and satisfactions of this life? to heap up riches, to acquire and enjoy glory and reputation among men? You have souls too noble to be destined for such wretched and perishable things; for here below, pleasures are quickly changed into pains, riches perish, glory vanishes like smoke. Why then did God make you? Was it to continue a long career upon earth, to find there your happiness, and to look for nothing after this life? If so, there is no difference between you and the irrational creation. The human heart unceasingly craves happiness; man is, therefore, created to be happy; but in order to be happy, he must seek his happiness where it can alone be found. Some seek their happiness in honors, others in pleasures, others again in riches, but are honors, pleasures, and riches, the end for which man is created? Does not the noble soul which God bestowed on you, clearly manifest that you are created for a higher and more honorable end? Does not the formation of the body you bear, the erect stature,—the uplifted head,—the eyes raised towards heaven,—do not all these teach you that you are not made for the earth? Beasts are made for the earth, there they find their happiness, and for that reason, their heads incline towards the earth.

In God alone, you will find peace and happiness, because you will find only in him the end for which he placed you in this world. The heart of man never is, and never can be, satisfied with the goods of this world, because it does not find in them its centre; it is uneasy without them, but more uneasy in the possession of them. God is the end for which you are created; he, alone, can complete your happiness. The things of this world may have their charms, they may be useful, and agreeable to the senses, but man is not made for them, and, consequently, they can never make him happy. You are not created for the things of this world, but they are created for you, for your use and benefit. They are to serve you and to minister to your wants; but you are not to serve them. They are the means to the end, but not the end itself. You are not forbidden to desire them, and you are allowed to acquire them by lawful means, but only so far as they are conducive to your eternal happiness. I, therefore, say again, the possession of all earthly goods, the enjoyment of all possible pleasures will not make you happy, because you were not made for them. You are made for heaven, that is the place of your abode, as it is the source of your origin.

And what will you find in heaven that can render you happy? Will it be the sight of the firmament with all its beautiful stars, the vision of all

that is great and marvelous in heaven? No, all these things cannot effect your happiness. God has esteemed them too mean for you. He made them for your service; not to be the object of your happiness. In a word, consider that of all that the universe contains, not one of those vast and wonderful things which God has created, not one, my brethren, is capable of completing your happiness. For what then were you created? For nothing less than the possession and enjoyment of God himself in heaven. He has not judged the fairest of creatures worthy of you; he has given himself to be the object of your happiness, and for this reason, he gave you souls formed to his image, capable of possessing him, and, (as every one finds by experience), because of this very capacity, never to be satisfied with the pleasures and delights of this life. I repeat it again and again: You were not made for creatures, but for the Creator. Your last end is not the enjoyment of creatures, but of God himself. You were created to be happy in the possession of God in heaven and to reign with him in a felicity incomprehensible to human understanding. "The eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for them that love him." And this for how long? For all eternity, for a time that shall never end, but which shall continue as long as God shall be God. This is the most noble end for which you are designed; this is the inheritance which your heavenly Father has prepared for you; this is the end for which he has created you. All this visible world is but destined for your present use, to aid you in promoting the glory of the Creator.

What have you done, hitherto, to attain the blessed end for which God has designed you? Have you aspired thither with all your heart? Have you endeavored to make yourself worthy of it? Alas! perhaps, so far, you have not even seriously thought of it; perhaps, you are widely removed from it by a life of sin, imitating the great multitude of men, who turn their backs upon that happy country to which their heavenly Father calls them. How much I deplore your misfortune, if you are of that number! Wherefore, consider what you have to do in order to compass that happy end for which you are created. How long will you think so little of heaven? How long will you forget heaven, O ye children of heaven, whose origin is heavenly, and who are designed for heaven alone? O man, says St. Peter Chrysologus, what have you to do with the earth, who pretend to be of heavenly extraction, in as much as you say: "Our Father, who art in heaven"? Manifest a celestial life in an earthly habitation; if you live otherwise, you stain your noble escutcheon, and disgrace your heavenly origin.

Make a holy resolution on this first day of the year, to begin a new life with the New year, to aspire to that happy end for which you are created: to labor carefully to make yourself worthy of it by a life not unbecoming the children of God destined to possess heaven and God himself. This

can be effected by flying sin, the only obstacle that can oppose your progress to heaven, and by embracing virtue, the only path that leads direct to heaven.

Last night, my dear brethren, we witnessed, (doubtless with some natural regret) the dissolution of the Old year, which, like an old friend whose sands of life have run out, lay cold and dead upon the bier of Time; but before its funeral chimes, (the strokes of the midnight-bell) had ceased to vibrate upon the air, we had assisted, with very different emotions, at the birth of its successor, the New Year, 1886. Thus, do the years of our lives pass into Eternity, bearing their indelible records of good or evil; thus, do the departing moments, like the waters of a rapid stream, glide from us, one by one, to the great Ocean, never more to return. And we, dear Christians, are like the ships which the strong currents carry along, bringing them every moment closer and closer to their destination or last end. Each step we take brings us nearer to death, to judgment, to Eternity. To some of us,—perchance to all,—this New Year (whose nativity we hail to-day), may prove the last year of our lives. Ponder these solemn words long and well, my dear brethren: "*The last year of our lives!*" Only one more span of twelve short months in which, perhaps, to redeem all the misspent time of the past, to expiate all the sins you have committed in the years that are gone! O, if an angel from heaven were to appear this moment in our midst, and, pointing his shining finger at one or other of this congregation, should proclaim aloud in trumpet-tones of prophecy: "Here is one whom God wills to die to-morrow; there, another who will not outlive the month; there, a third,—a fourth,—a fifth,—a sixth who will go to render an account to his Judge before the close of six short months!"—with what fear and consternation would not those doomed ones fall upon their knees, and, fervently imploring God's mercy, begin, at once, to make ready for the dread Hereafter.

Dear Christians, that angel is even now in our midst, although we see him not. The Angel of Death is this very moment invisibly hovering near, adjusting his bow and fixing the fatal dart which will, ere long, strike down, perhaps, the strongest, the most robust of my hearers. There is no security, no defence against Death. This time last year, there were thirty-two millions of living, breathing people upon the face of the earth who now lie cold and still beneath its surface, or are hidden in the depths of its great waters. At the commencement of 1885, many of these (now) departed souls thought as little about death as *you* do at present. Very likely, if they were adjured by Christ's minister, on last New Year's day, to make ready for the grave, for the judgment, to which they were rapidly (though unconsciously), hastening, many of them laughed the preacher to scorn. They were as full of their plans and prospects *then*, as some of you are to-day. They were engrossed with their business, their money-getting, their marriages, their law-suits,—with their pleasures, their honors, or, alas!

their vices. They felt like immortals. They were full of health and strength, the currents of life and youth ran warm and fresh and passionately in their veins. Who would dare talk to *them* of death? Yet, here in this church, to-day, my brethren, you are filling this moment some of their vacant seats, whilst *they*,—*they*, O God! are swallowed up in the depths of that awful Eternity they, once, so little feared or prized! They had a precious New Year given to them in 1885, and they made no use of it for salvation. *God never gave them another chance to slight his mercy.*

They were like the slothful servant in the Gospel who hid his talent in the earth. They hid their talents in the earth of a negligent life, in the mire of their vices and iniquities: and since they brought forth no interest for their Lord and Master they were fated, at last, to hear from his sacred lips that terrible sentence: “The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”—Matt. 25: 30. Many of those unhappy wretches, had they but reformed their lives a year ago, might now be blessed souls enjoying the Beatific Vision in heaven. They were exhorted to it, my dear friends, as *you* are now exhorted; they were forewarned of their danger, as *you* are now forewarned,—but, taking it for granted that they had many happy years before them, they presumptuously neglected the means of salvation, until it was too late:—they were suddenly swept from the face of the earth by God's avenging arm, and hurried in a state of impenitence to the awful tribunal of divine justice. Where shall we find a more impressive sermon than that which these miserable spirits preach to us from out the depths of hell! Out of the terrible tortures of their prison house, they cry to us unceasingly, and warn us all to begin this New Year well, and to make good use of our time before the night of death overtakes us. Attend to the voices of these lost ones, and profit by their awful example. Do not lose sight, dear brethren, of the countless years of Eternity, but begin in time to lay up a store of good works against that last tremendous hour which will decide our everlasting destiny,—which will consign us, forever, either to the companionship of filthy demons in the unspeakable torments of hell, or to the sweet society of God and his Blessed Mother, his angels and his saints, in the eternal delights of heaven. Amen.

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*Would to God that we priests would take more interest in preparing our sermons, what amount of good we could produce!*

## NEW YEAR'S DAY.

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SALVATION OUR ONLY AFFAIR OF IMPORTANCE.

*“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from her.”*—St. Luke 10:41, 42.

The two sisters, Martha and Mary, had once the enviable happiness of entertaining Christ, our Lord, in their own home. Martha busied herself in running to and fro, striving to set things in order, and to prepare a costly entertainment for the Divine Guest. But Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listened in silence and peace to the words falling from his sacred lips. She forgot to give assistance to her sister, turning her back upon worldly things, and thinking only of spiritual things and the business of her salvation. Martha, in consequence, made a forcible complaint against her, that she left the burden of the domestic work entirely on her shoulders. “Lord, hast thou no care that my sister hath left me alone to serve? Speak to her, therefore, that she help me.” (Luke 10:41.) Was Martha justified in this reproach? Did Jesus take her part against Mary? No; the only response she received from him was an assurance that she was too solicitous for the cares of this world. Martha merited the gentle censure of the Son of God, when with too great solicitude she undertook a work which was good in itself; a work no less than that of entertaining the Son of God in his humanity with becoming hospitality. What rebuke, then, will those deserve who labor, (not for a single day alone, but for months and years), disquieting themselves over the vain and wretched concerns of this transitory life, and neglecting entirely the important business of salvation? And yet, there are many such Christians. What are they doing, and what are they striving to attain? What is the chief, perhaps, the only, object of all their thoughts, inclinations, and desires? What is it? It can be said in one word—the earth. As if they were created solely and singly for the earth! Of it, alone, they think, for it, alone, they labor; they conduct themselves, in short, as if they were destined to live upon it for ever. They spare neither toil nor expense, shrink from no peril, to heap up riches, to acquire a great name among men, to enjoy deceitful pleasures, and to obtain in the end, an uncertain happiness. But there is one thing which they neglect altogether, namely,—the eternal salvation of their immortal souls; that salvation which being once happily gained, all is gained, but which being once miserably lost, all is lost, and lost for ever. Whence does this blindness proceed? I believe that it proceeds from three errors.

1. These negligent Christians do not reflect that the business of salvation is their most important business upon earth; that it is, in fact, not only the

most important, but the sole business of every sane man, because his true and eternal felicity depends on the salvation of his soul.

II. They imagine it to be a business which is easily accomplished, and that it is a useless and superfluous task to trouble one's self much about it; but I maintain that this business is not as easily transacted as they suppose, and that one must labor unceasingly to accomplish it.

III. They do not consider that to fail in the execution of this important affair, is to make an irreparable blunder. A wilful error in this matter once made and persevered in, can never be corrected; this business, neglected entirely until the moment of death, remains neglected for ever.

I. The more precious the thing in question, and the greater the consequences and interests which it involves, the greater and more important is the business which concerns it. Whilst the trial of an alleged murderer is in progress, if there be no positive, but only circumstantial evidence of the crime,—the unfortunate culprit together with all his relatives and friends, is vacillating between fear and hope, doubtful whether he will be acquitted, or condemned to death. When the fate of the city of Carthage was under deliberation in the Roman Senate; when it was a subject of debate whether or not the glorious rival of Rome, the capital of Africa, and the mother of heroes, should be destroyed and levelled to the ground,—the whole world was in a condition of painful suspense and anxiety as to the result. Natural and justifiable, (humanly-speaking), is this solicitude of a suspected criminal and his friends over the issues of life and death; this anxiety of the nations over the contemplated destruction of a vast city. But these temporal things and their interests are as nothing when weighed in the balance with an immortal soul. The soul of the meanest beggar alive is worth more than all the gold of the earth, all the cities of the universe; for its priceless value far exceeds that of all created objects.

But, since, in order to realize the importance of eternal salvation, we must first understand the value of an immortal soul, — let us now inquire into the origin from which that noble essence derives so high a value. The soul of man is created immediately by God; — a fact which bestows on her an essential greatness and the highest patent of nobility. It is true, that all other creatures can boast of the same origin, but there is a great difference between their creation and that of the soul. God made other creatures by a single word: “Be made,” he said, and they were made. It was not so with the soul. To create the soul, the three Divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity held, as it were, a council; and in this council, (if I be allowed the expression,) the creation of man was decreed upon: “Let us make man to our own image and likeness.” The soul of man was made in the most wonderful manner, for God breathed into his face the breath of life. And as the breath proceeds from the heart, so we may say, the soul of man proceeded from the most amiable Heart of God. Who does not see that of all the marvels and mysteries of creation, that of the soul was the most im-

portant work of God? Hence, we may understand that man should consider no other business so important as that of the salvation of his soul.

If we penetrate, by meditation, into the interior nature of the soul, we find in her such beauty, such glorious prerogatives, that we are convinced she is worthy of all the care, the labor, the exertions, necessary to save her. What is the soul? It is not possible to convey a clear and perfect idea of this beautiful breath of God, but we may say of the soul that she is a spiritual, rational, and immortal being. When the Most High created her, he communicated to her a ray of his own life, and imprinted on her the noble likeness of his own image; he raised her above all creatures, made her a little lower than the Angels, invested her with honor and glory, and perfected in her, (as it were,) the masterpiece of his hand.

If we add to the gifts of nature, (with which God has enriched her in her creation), the gifts of grace with which he has invested her in the holy Sacraments, how much more noble and precious does she not appear? This grace causes her to partake of the Divine nature itself, and raises her to the eminent dignity of a daughter of God. He, himself, seeing her thus adorned, is, as it were, captivated and wounded by love, and calls her his friend, his sister, his spouse; he promises to dwell in her; and declares, (O marvelous condescension!) that he finds his delight in being with her. In effect, what is there that God has not done for the soul of man? Attend to the excess of his love for her, and this, alone, will give you an adequate idea of the dignity and preciousness of your soul. To redeem and save your soul, the Eternal Father gave his only begotten Son as a ransom; and, O, answer me, has not this only begotten Son suffered all that he could for her sake? He abhorred not the virgin's womb to assume human nature, and to take our sins upon himself. And on account of these sins, he was born in a stable, led a hidden life for thirty years in the house of Joseph, (the poor carpenter of Galilee); preached, prayed, wept, suffered and died on the cross. Would he have done all this for the salvation of your soul,—would he have purchased her at such a dear rate, if he had not known her to be something great, and worthy of such a ransom?

What do you say to this incontrovertible truth? Is your soul something precious, or is it not? Your answer is: It is. Is not her salvation the most important business of life? Why, then, is this most important business neglected by so many Christians? To confound these tepid believers and to show them how highly they should value their immortal souls, I will send them to the school of their Arch-Enemy, where they shall learn the truth, —even though it be from the very father of lies. What price does *he* put upon a soul? I shall say nothing of the continual temptations with which he annoys us, of the many snares he spreads for us, of the artifices and stratagems which he employs to entrap us, and to get possession of our souls;—facts which every one knows to his grief by his own experience, as well as by the teachings of the Prince of the Apostles who says, that “our

enemy, the devil, goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." I shall mention one occurrence of which the Gospel speaks. When Christ had fasted forty days and forty nights, he permitted the devil to tempt him. Among other temptations, Satan made use of this. He took the Son of God up into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them and said to him: "All these I will give to thee, if falling down, thou wilt adore me." In other words: "All these I will give thee, if thou, on thy part, wilt give me, wilt sell to me, thy soul." What a price does not the devil offer for a soul! He is willing to give a world in exchange for it. "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What, then, shall we say of those Christians who give their souls to the devil, not for a kingdom, not for a world, but for the most wretched trifles of this world, for a mere nothing! What madness to sell so great a treasure, such a precious jewel, at so low a price!

The importance of the business of salvation is, also, evident from the consequences which its neglect infallibly entails. Let us, at the beginning of a New year, examine this matter a little closer than we usually do; and for this end, let us look up towards heaven. Behold there, the eternal kingdom of glory, a never-fading crown, a perfect, never-ending felicity! Now, let every one of us say to himself: "If I save my soul, I shall possess the kingdom of heaven, and be crowned with a never-fading crown of glory; I shall see and enjoy God for ever!" But after this upward glance at the mansions of eternal bliss,—let us look down into hell, that frightful prison, those ever-burning fires, the abode of horrors, and of never-ceasing pains and torments. Now, if I do not save my soul, that prison shall be my dwelling-place forever. There is no middle way: either happiness or misery, heaven or hell, for ever; either to enjoy God everlasting in company with all his Angels and Saints, or to be damned in company with merciless devils, and trodden under their feet for an endless eternity. O, the frightful situation of man upon this earth, uncertain at all times whether he be worthy of hatred or love! What business then can be more important than the business of our salvation? And you who think so little of this business, because you are immersed in the cares of this world, tell me,—if you succeed in everything else, but not in the salvation of your soul, what shall it profit you? Foolish man, you serve the world, both day and night; you are solicitous for the things of this world, living in fear lest you should lose what you possess; you devote little or no time to prayer, you neglect the Sacraments, perform no good works; in a word, you trample your soul under your feet. But, suppose you obtain the object of all your desires, suppose you gain the whole world, what shall it profit you if you lose your own soul? Foolish woman! do you devote as much time to the business of your salvation, as you do to dressing and visiting? Do you undergo the same fatigues for your soul that you undergo to please the world, or to

shine in society? Do you spend as much time at prayer, as you spend before the looking-glass? You find leisure enough to read novels and other trash, but you cannot find time to say your morning and evening prayers. What profit has Alexander the Great from all his exploits? Absolom from his ambitious plans, Dives from his sumptuous dinners, the daughter of Herodias from her shameless dances, Judas from his thirty pieces of silver? What does it profit so many others to have enjoyed the pleasures of the world, to have accumulated riches, to have acquired a great name among men, if they have lost their immortal souls? To possess and enjoy the whole world for a thousand years, avails us nothing, if we should be so unfortunate, in the end, as to lose our souls.

II. How, then, is it possible that a business of such paramount importance and of such dreadful consequences, is so much neglected by the generality of Christians? How is it possible that Christians who have the true faith, who have the example of Christ and the Saints before their eyes, can run to such an excess of madness as to neglect it? The chief reason is this: *They believe that this business is easily done, and that it is not necessary to spend much time at it.* If they be exhorted to a change of life, they say: Let us alone with your scruples; we must enjoy the present life, and we shall be saved in the end as well as those whose tongue is ever praying. God wills that all men should be saved; he has made heaven for men, and not for horses. Yes, they say, (in actions, if not in words), the kingdom of heaven is for us all; laughing and jesting and living worse than heathens, we shall all enter there without doing anything to deserve it. Who has deceived you with this false doctrine which is diametrically opposed to the Gospel preached by Christ and his Apostles? No, I maintain, in accordance with the doctrine of Christ, that it is not so easy to be saved as these lukewarm Christians imagine. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away; therefore, we must devote all our time and energies to the important business of salvation.

I do not say that it is impossible to be saved; and even when I say, that it is difficult to be saved, I do not mean to infer that the difficulty is on the part of God; as if it were not his will that every one should be saved; as if, in short, he had made the way to heaven so thorny that it could not be trodden by all. These would be gross errors. God will have all men to be saved; Christ died for all; God gives to all the necessary graces to obtain salvation. The way to eternal Life is the keeping of his commandments, and his commandments are not heavy. It is not impossible to observe them, for he says: "My yoke is sweet and my burden is light." The difficulty is on our side; it comes from our corrupt inclinations and perverse wills. The miseries and dangers of concupiscence are manifold,—the will of man, both obstinate and inconstant; and because the proper remedies are not used against all these evils, it is difficult for the multitude to be saved, nay, only a few succeed in attaining eternal Life. Hear the words of Christ: "From

the days of St. John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away." And again: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me." "Enter ye at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat; how narrow is the gate, and strait the way that leadeth to life, and few there are who find it."

Now I ask you the question: Is it easy or difficult to do violence to ourselves, to subdue all our evil and unruly passions, to carry the cross daily, to enter in at the narrow gate? Tell me, what way are you going, you, who concern yourselves so little about your salvation, who are as sure of it as if you had the deed of it in your hands? You, who say: "Let us alone with your scruples,"—answer my question, who is it that deceives you, Christ or the world? Christ declares that the way to heaven is strait, and you say that it is broad; Christ teaches that man can be saved only by doing violence to himself, by self-denial, mortification, the daily carriage of the cross; and you say, that you can be saved by a voluptuous, idle, worldly life. Who is right? If it be so easy to be saved, why are only a few saved? Many should obtain a thing which is so easily obtained, and so much desired by all. All wish to be saved, for there is hardly one to be found so lost to faith as to say: "I wish to be damned." If it be so easy to be saved, all, or at least, the greater part of mankind should be saved; but this is not the case, for Christ says: "Many are called, few are chosen."

Who would believe, that St. Paul, that vessel of election, that astonishing triumph of grace, that heroic missionary burning with zeal for the honor of God, indefatigable in labors and sufferings; that incomparable Apostle, who excelled all others, who, while yet in this world, was elevated to the third heaven, and was privileged to carry the wounds of Christ in his body,—who, I say, would believe that St. Paul was not sure of the salvation of his soul? And yet, he was not; for, as he plainly tells us in his Epistle to the Corinthians, in spite of all this, he did not think himself justified: "I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet in this I am not justified;" "I, therefore, so run, not as at an uncertainty: I so fight, not as one beating the air: but I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a reprobate." (Cor. 9: 26, 27.) And this fear he desired to communicate to all men, saying: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2: 12.) Can we, then, be so blind as to think ourselves secure, we, who do nothing to save our souls, but everything to ruin them for ever?

But, perhaps you will say: "Father, you terrify us by your forcible words!" Are you really terrified? Why complain of my words? You would have cause to reproach me, if the words I used were my own, but they are not; you would have a right to complain, if I, who preach these truths were not as much terrified by them, as you who listen to them. Thus

St. Augustine once said to his congregation at Hippo, and using his words I reply to you: "Have I written the Gospel? Have I laid down the words which I preach to you to-day? Are these words, perhaps, melancholy and whimsical inventions of my own head, or are they not truths which God himself has revealed to us? I preach to you nothing but what I find in the Gospel; and, moreover, I am in the same ship with yourselves, in the same danger of perishing in which *you* are." But you will rejoin: Father, if it is as difficult to be saved as you say, if only a few are really saved, we are in a desperate condition, and there is no use in trying to be saved. We may just as well enjoy, as long as we can, all the attainable delights of the present life. We may as well give full scope to our passions. O my brethren, what do you say? What wicked conclusions do you not draw? Will you, then, yield to a fatal despair? Ah! that is exactly what would please the devil, to rush headlong and with open eyes into perdition; and, because it is difficult to be saved, to risk an eternity of torments for a few days of pleasure and joy. This is not the conclusion you must draw from the truths I have propounded to you. On the contrary, you must say: It is difficult to be saved; therefore, I must amend my life and devote more time, than hitherto, to the business of salvation. I must make prompt and earnest use of the necessary means to attain that blessed end. The task was just as difficult for the martyrs, confessors, and virgins; for the Saints of every state, age, sex, and condition of life,—just as laborious for them as it is for us, and yet they obtained the object of their desires. They attained the salvation of their souls. Why should we not be able to do the same? We have the same faith, the same means of salvation, the same Gospel, the same Advocate with the Father, Christ Jesus, and God will give us all the graces necessary to secure that end. Only a few are saved, hence, we must strive to be of the number of the few. Few, comparatively speaking, receive the Sacraments with fruit; few pray as they ought, few fulfil the duties of their respective states of life; few do what is necessary to save their souls; therefore, if you would belong to that blessed minority, you must resolve to do penance for your sins; to receive the Sacraments more frequently; devote more time to prayer, discharge the duties of your state of life more faithfully; disengage yourselves more and more from all unprofitable cares, and think only of the one thing necessary.

III. Ah, if men would do for their souls only the tenth part of what they do for their bodies, they would soon become great Saints. But they hardly ever consider, that a failure once made in this business, can never be repaired; that this business, neglected to the hour of death, remains neglected for ever. I would willingly excuse those Christians who are slothful and negligent in this important concern, if the loss of the soul could be repaired in one way or another. But a mistake in the affair of salvation, once made, can never be corrected. We have but one soul, and if we once lose that one soul, it is lost for ever!

When David went to fight with Goliah, he put five pebbles into his scrip, so that if one would miss, he should have another at hand;—but we can strike but once, and if we miss our aim that once, it is missed for ever. When you are sick, you console yourselves with the hope, that you will get well again; if you lose an eye, a hand, or a foot, you are grieved, and justly so; but you find consolation, nevertheless, in the thought that you have one eye, one hand, one foot left, with which to help yourselves. But if you lose your soul, what consolation have you? None. What blindness, then, is it to possess but one soul, and to take no care of it? to be entrusted with a priceless jewel, and to exchange it for a mere nothing? Thus King David thought, who, considering that he had but one soul, wept, prayed, and did penance, saying to God: “Deliver, O Lord, my soul from the sword, my only one from the hand of the dog!” Thus, also, thought Pope Innocent XI. When forced to choose between the hard alternative of doing what his conscience forbade or displeasing a mighty potentate, he said to the royal ambassador: “Make known to your master, that I have but one soul. If I had two, I might sacrifice one to please him, but having only one, I am not so foolish as to lose it in order to gain the good will of any man!” Noble words! which we should deeply engrave upon our minds, and make, henceforth, our own. Young man, when your comrades wish to entice you to sin, when they invite you to go into that evil house, into that society or place, where you foresee that you will lose your soul, say: “I cannot, I have only one soul, and I will not lose it to please you!” Young woman, say to the tempter and the would-be-seducer, who only cultivates your friendship in order to gratify his lust, and render you unhappy for time and eternity: “Begone, tempter, I have but one soul and I am not going to sell that noble soul for a filthy pleasure!” In all dangers, in all temptations, my brethren, therefore, let us exclaim: “I have but one soul, if I lose that one soul, all is lost and lost for ever; for out of hell there is no redemption!”

The business of salvation, then, should be our only care and business; and to it we should earnestly and perseveringly apply all our time and energies. Let us watch and pray; no vigilance can be too great where an eternity is at stake. For this purpose, let us spare no pains, fear no dangers or persecutions,—even though we should have to fight unto death for justice. Christ called that merchant wise who, when he saw a precious pearl, sold all that he had, that he might purchase it. To merit the same praise, my dear brethren, give all you possess to save your priceless souls. When a ship is in danger of being shipwrecked, the sailors throw all the goods overboard in order to save their lives; so you, too, mariners on the stormy sea of this uncertain life, you, too, must throw overboard everything that can hinder you, even in the least, from the salvation of your immortal souls.

**SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S DAY.**

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JESUS BECAME MAN, THAT WE MIGHT LOVE HIM THE MORE.

*“They are dead who sought the life of the Child.” Matth. 2: 20.*

Has the world ever witnessed a greater cruelty than that recorded of Herod the King? Seeking the life of the Infant Jesus, he shed the blood of numberless innocent babes in and about the city of Bethlehem, even destroying, it is said, his own royal offspring. Must not his heart have been destitute of all the feelings of humanity, when he could resolve on the wholesale massacre of so many new-born, helpless children? “But they are dead who sought the life of the Child.” My brethren, are they all dead? Herod is dead, it is true; but are there not thousands among us who daily renew this cruelty to the Infant Jesus? Are there not myriads among us who hourly seek the life of the Child? What barbarity! For if we consider the condition of a little child,—who but a brute could hate its innocent, guileless, and amiable infancy? Every one must love a little child; he is a monster who can wilfully harm a defenceless babe. For this reason, the Son of God condescended to become a helpless child, that we might not hate and offend, but love him all the more.

There was no necessity for the Son of God to assume the form of an infant; he might have come into the world, and begun his mortal career as a perfect man. The first man, Adam, was created in the form of a perfect man; and, in the same manner, Christ, the second Adam, could have assumed human nature, without assuming the helplessness of infancy. The office of Redeemer certainly did not require of Christ that he should embrace the condition of childhood. Why, then, did he assume human nature in this form? He exhibited himself to the world as a child, in order to make himself more amiable. He knew that infancy possessed the most powerful influence over our affections, that infancy has such attractive qualities, it is impossible not to love it. The innocence that sparkles in the eyes of children, their simplicity of manners, the sincerity with which they speak, their joyous laughter: these, and all their other winning charms, cannot fail to endear them to our hearts.

We love even irrational creatures whilst they are young; we love to feed them, and to play with them; and when Jesus assumes human nature, and becomes a child for our sakes, shall he be the only little one to whom we will refuse our love?

If ever an amiable child came into the world, it surely was this divine

Child, now lying before us on a little bed of straw. Other children are children, not because they will to be so, but because they cannot help it. But Jesus is a child, because, out of love for us, he willed to become a child, and to suffer the helplessness of infancy and childhood. To win our affections, he not only condescended to become a child, but what kind of a child? A Child in the greatest poverty, destitute of all earthly friendship, despised by the world and wrapped in swaddling clothes; a Child who lay in a manger, with a handful of straw for his bed, and between two mean animals, whose breath scarcely served to keep off the cold. In such poverty and misery he wished to be born,—becoming a helpless babe to move us to compassion, and, through compassion, to love.

I ask again: What kind of a child is this? He is an omniscient Child. We love children who do not know us, who cannot tell us who and what we are, but this Child knows us through and through. Approach his crib, and you will find that he knows each and every one of you. He can tell you all the sins which you have committed during life; for which, in his mercy, he has granted you pardon. He can tell you what good works you have done; he knows all your necessities, the tribulations and sorrows that press heavily upon your hearts, and which he came into this world to alleviate. This amiable child trembles with cold, sighs, and weeps with pain and misery, and suffers all this for our sake. If we were allowed to look into his Heart, we would clearly see how matters stand with us; we would see that this Child desires nothing, and seeks nothing, but our hearts; and that his Heart is yearning for our salvation. We may justly call him *our* Child. What a blessing! “A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us.” (Is. 9: 6.) He became man solely for our relief, our comfort, our salvation. He has given himself to us whole and entire that we might find in him a Brother, Physician, Teacher, and Guide.

If we do not love this Son of Mary, this omniscient and merciful Son of God, from any other cause, O, let us love him, at least, because he is our Child. We fondly love everything that is our own; we love our parents, our country, our property, our health, our bodies. Why, then, should we not love this, our own Child? He belongs to us by many titles; he is the most precious treasure which we can, or shall, ever possess. Yes, (if we only will it), we can and shall possess him for ever. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We eagerly and ardently love so many other things, let us, then, bestow on this Child a share, at least, of our love and affection. If our heart is not devoid of all human gratitude and sympathy, we cannot refuse to love him who has first loved us, and who has done everything to win our affections; who even became a child for our sakes that it might be easier for us to love him.

If he cannot, thus, win from us that love which his due, he (with justice), requires and demands of us that, at all events, we should never forget ourselves so far as to offend him. God has striven from the beginning,

either by the threat of punishment, or by the promise of reward, to keep man from sin; but in these latter days, he makes use of the most striking and effectual means. He becomes a Child. What man can be so insensible, what heart so cruel as to resolve to maltreat, abuse, or kill a tender child? All nature revolts against such a thought. Esau was fully prepared, with his four hundred men, to war against his brother Jacob, and to kill him and all that were with him; but as soon as he beheld Jacob's children, and especially the little Joseph in his mother's arms, his anger and hatred were disarmed. The mere sight of those innocent children rendered it impossible for him to gratify his desire of revenge.

The same spectacle is exhibited before our eyes in these days. God has tried in every way to make us averse to sin; he threatens to punish us, unless we cease to offend him; he promises to reward us if we love and obey him; but we are quite unconcerned about his threats and his promises; we rebel against our Master; we persistently abuse and offend him. Look at the Infant Jesus in the arms of Mary, his mother. Which of you can have the heart to tear this amiable Child from her embrace, and treat him with cruelty? Who will be so void of every human feeling as to strike and wound this tender Child? It is cruel and, at the same time, highly criminal even to contemplate such a deed. And, yet, after all, we are guilty of just such cruelty as often as we commit a mortal sin; it is an article of our holy faith that we crucify Jesus by every mortal sin we commit. As often as we are guilty of a grievous sin, we fall, as it were, with the greatest rage upon this amiable Child, tear him from the fond embraces of his Mother, trample his sacred Blood under our feet; and thus perpetrate in the Stable of Bethlehem what the Jews did on Calvary.

We tremble with resentment when we read or hear of the torrents of blood which Herod, (through his minions), shed in and about Bethlehem. He thirsted for the blood of the Infant Jesus,—not believing him to be the Son of God, but a usurper who, when grown up, would aspire to his throne and deprive him of his kingdom. But let us turn our indignation against ourselves; let us be sincere, and acknowledge the truth. Do not our malice and cruelty go still farther? We, also, seek the life of the Child, but we know and believe that Child to be God. We have promised at our baptism to follow his standard; yea, we have vowed most solemnly (and renewed this solemn promise at our first Communion), that we would always acknowledge him as our God, love and serve him alone, defend his cause, promote his glory, and, if necessary, die for him. And yet, after all our pledges and promises, we seek and take his life, that is, we break our promises, and commit mortal sin. Would you not call that wretched man mad who would run to the crib of Bethlehem, tear this Child from his Mother's arms, trample him under his feet, and crush his sacred Infant Heart? We shudder with horror at the bare thought of such a deed, and yet we do not scruple to do this very thing ourselves, (too often with a

laughing face), whenever we commit mortal sin; for the Apostle says: He who hates his brother and who violates the commandments of God and of his Church; he, in fine, who loves the creature more than the Creator, has trodden the Son of God under foot. Do you not believe this? God himself has declared it by his Apostle. Can he, who is Eternal Truth, exaggerate? Can he paint the cruelty of the sinner in darker colors than its reality? If we are really Christians, we are bound to believe the Word of God when it asserts: That the commission of grievous sin and the trampling upon, and crucifixion of, the new-born Child, are one and the same thing.

I readily admit that there are none present whom I would suspect of this atrocity; for I am inclined to believe you all are resolved to avoid sin, and to lead a truly Christian life. But before I dismiss you, I will recall to your mind an occurrence of which the Scripture speaks. At the time when Moses was born, King Pharaoh ordered all the new-born babes of the Israelites to be killed. The mother of Moses, however, hid him for three months, and when she could conceal him no longer, she took a basket made of bulrushes, coated it with slime and pitch, put the babe therein, and laid him in the sedges by the river's bank, saying: "Ye merciful waves, and thou, O angel guardian of my child, take care of this infant, and commend him to merciful hands." And, behold, the daughter of Pharaoh came afterwards down to the river, and saw the basket in the sedges of the bank; she sent one of her maids for it, and when it was brought to her, she opened it, and, seeing in it an infant, crying, she had compassion on him, and adopted him as her son. The Jews and Gentiles, on the contrary,—the sinners of all ages,—do not care about the Infant Jesus; they leave him exposed to the inclemency of a cold and stormy season, and neither receive him into their hearts, nor warm him by their love.

It depends on us, my dear brethren, whether we, on our part, will imitate these cruel men, or whether we will show to the divine Child the love which the King's daughter showed to the child Moses. Christ desires our heart for his dwelling-place. Can we refuse it to him? I hope not. O let us receive him into our hearts, and warm him by our love; and for the love of him let us endure with patience all the hardships incident to our state of life. By doing this, we shall secure to ourselves the purest happiness both here and hereafter, for the Gospel of St. John asserts for our consolation: As many as received him, to them he gave power to be made the sons of God on earth, and the heirs of the kingdom in heaven. Amen.

**SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S DAY.****THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.**

*“They are dead who sought the life of the Child.” Matt. 9: 20.*

Jesus was scarcely born, when Herod conceived the wicked design of destroying him. For this evil purpose, he requested the Wise Men from the East to search diligently after the Child, and when they had found him, to bring him word again, that he also might come and adore him. But, although his cruel design was masked by these cunning words, it was doomed to disappointment, for the Wise Men, having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, went back another way into their own country. Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the Magi, was exceedingly angry; and, sending, he killed all the male-children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the confines thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men; firmly believing that the Child could not escape. But how wonderful, my brethren, are the ways of divine Providence! The Infant Christ, on whose account the wretched Herod ordained such a terrible slaughter, was not among the slain, but lived on in Egypt in peace and security. And now, behold, at last, Herod has spent his rage, that cruel and sanguinary monster can shed no more blood—he is dead. “Herod being dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Rise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead, who sought the life of the child; who, rising up, took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.” There, by the command of God, the holy Foster-father chose Nazareth, the despised hamlet, for their dwelling place. There, Jesus lived for thirty years a hidden life, after which he began his public ministry by preaching the Gospel, and performing miracles throughout Judea and Galilee. In this Biblical account of important events, dear Christians, we clearly perceive the wonderful ways of divine Providence,

- I. In its dealings with the good, and*
- II. In its dealings with the wicked.*

I. Truly, wonderful are the dealings of God's Providence in regard to his elect, he often leads them in ways quite different from the modes of men.

*1. He warns them against danger without removing the danger.* If we see a dear friend of ours in a position of imminent peril, we hasten at once to his aid, and if it be in our power, we do our best to help him out of his difficulty. God is almighty; there is no danger or peril, from which he could not deliver us. He loves the just man, and watches over him as over the apple of his eye. But, strange to say, he does not always avert impending disasters, but contents himself with merely giving warning of their approach. We perceive this in the event recorded in this day's Gospel.

The Infant Jesus is in the greatest peril; Herod is about to take the life of the Child. Does God arrest the uplifted arm of the tyrant? Does he remove the danger by the sudden death of the King? No, he merely sends an angel to Joseph, saying: "Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child, to destroy him." This is God's way. Thus Jesus, later on, warned his followers against the misfortunes which threatened them at the future destruction of Jerusalem, by his prophecy of the various extraordinary signs which preceded that awful calamity. We, my brethren, in our turn, are living in a time whose ominous prognostications may well make us fear for the worst in the not far distant future. We are standing over the crater of a volcano. Wars, revolutions, persecutions of the Church, are impending. God does not remove these dangers, he only gives notice of them by signs so significant that they do not permit us to doubt they shall, eventually, come to pass. —Why does he act in this manner? We may assign a two-fold reason for his dealings with us in this regard. The knowledge of the peril which threatens us, inspires us with humility, since we find ourselves utterly unable of ourselves to remove it, or cope with it. In this consciousness of our own innate weakness and frailty, we are forced to exclaim: "O what impotent and miserable creatures we are, since we cannot help ourselves in the least!" This humility is, as you see, dear brethren, of great advantage to the soul; it banishes all proud and self-important thoughts from the mind while, at the same time, it urges us to seek help and relief from God alone. Again, the knowledge of our danger is a powerful incentive to make use of the means which reason, prudence, and religion suggest, since to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

*2. God often defers his assistance for some time.* You give twice, if you give readily, says the adage. Yet, God does not always act according to this saying. We have a proof thereof in the Gospel of this day. The Holy Family were exiled for several years in Egypt, and were forced to live there in straitened circumstances and destitution, before the angel revealed to Joseph that God willed them to return at last into their own country. Such is God's way in our own days, dear brethren. The Church

has been sorely persecuted for many years, the Holy Father is deprived of his patrimony and his revenues, and compelled to live as a prisoner in his own city; many religious orders have been suppressed, bishops and priests exiled, or forbidden under severe penalties to perform their lawful duties, the faithful are reviled, oppressed, persecuted; and the downfall of the Church is aimed at. And lo! God still defers his help and assistance; there is not a ray of light in the heavens to inspire us with hope that the storm will soon be over. Why does God not rise up to aid his Church and to crown her with victory? He defers his help for the good of his children. Afflictions and sufferings are the best means of expiating the temporal punishments due to sin, they banish worldliness from the heart, revive Christian fervor, and afford the most favorable opportunities for the practice of patience.

*3. God often sends help when it is least expected.* We, poor mortals, are accustomed to appoint a certain time when we promise to grant our neighbor a favor, or do him an act of kindness. We say: "I will do it to-day, or to-morrow." God does not act thus. He assures us that he will hear our prayer, and help us in all our necessities, but he never appoints the time to do so. Generally, God's assistance comes quite unexpectedly. Mary and Joseph, in obedience to God's will, go down with the divine Child into Egypt; many times the seasons come and go in their accustomed succession, but the holy couple live on in utter ignorance of the inscrutable designs of God in their regard. One evening, they retire to rest in their respective chambers (as they had done so many times before), without the least suspicion or hope that anything unusual was about to occur. But, behold, they had spent their last day in Egypt. Whilst the night was in the midst of its course, an angel appeared to Joseph, saying: "Arise, and take the Child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel." At last, their long exile, with all its inconveniences and hardships, is happily at an end.

This is God's way, as may be easily gathered from the history of the Church and the Lives of the Saints. The time of trials and tribulations is sometimes of a longer, sometimes, of a shorter duration, but, sooner or later, God always comes with help and deliverance; often, my brethren, when our necessity is greatest, and when relief is least expected. In a certain sense it may be said, that man's extremity is God's opportunity. The persecutions against the early Christians had lasted nearly three hundred years. The emperor Diocletian was making final and superhuman exertions to destroy the faithful of Christ, having sworn to erase the Christian name from the face of the earth. In the midst of this universal carnage, when the blood of the Saints flowed in torrents, the Christians had every reason to cry to God for help in the words of St. Peter: "Lord, save us, we perish." It was then, in the gloomiest hour of the Christian world,

when things seemed at the very worst with God's chosen children, when there appeared no avenue of escape from the world-wide and merciless power which clutched and ground them in its deadly grasp—it was then that the banner of Constantine was seen approaching in the distance, the famous Labarum, with the sign of the Cross emblazoned thereon, and glistening in the noonday-sun. Maxentius awaited him with his legions marshaled in battle-array along the banks of the Tiber. His troops were broken up, dispersed, and cut to pieces. Maxentius endeavored to cross the Tiber, but the bridge gave way beneath the multitude and the weight of fugitives, and the guilty emperor sunk into its red waters and was drowned. On the following day, October 29th, 312, Constantine made his triumphal entry into Rome, and proclaimed the Christian religion, the religion of the empire. Again, my brethren, in more recent times, the persecution of the Irish race for their religion has been unparalleled, perhaps, in the annals of history. But, though their enemies might "drive them into Connaught" by their cruelties, they could never drive them into hell by apostasy.

So, also, the present trials and tribulations of the Church will come to an end at a time when we least expect it. Faith still gilds the edges of the dark clouds. God's mills grind slowly, but surely. We, therefore, must not give way to despondency and lose confidence. Let us persevere in patience, and leave entirely to God the choice as to when and how he will take the cross from our shoulders; he knows what is best for us, and his assistance will assuredly come at the hour, when it is most necessary and salutary for us.

II. Equally as wonderful as the dealings of God with his elect, are his ways with regard to the unjust, for he often deals with them differently from what we, in our shortsightedness, would naturally expect.

*1. He lets the unjust have their own way;* he permits them to perpetrate every possible crime and sin, and does not constrain their free will. Were it in our power, we would prevent the wicked from accomplishing their nefarious designs, and by thus preventing them, we should only do what is our bounden duty, but God's ways are above our ways. He permits sinners to do all the mischief they please. Thus, he did not hinder Herod from killing so many innocent babes at Bethlehem; Jesus, the divine Child, preferred rather to withdraw from the companionship of those guileless martyrs, than put a stop to Herod's iniquity. In these our days, dear Christians, sins innumerable are committed, especially against justice and charity; men who have a lease of power, abuse it for the oppression and persecution of the just. God is powerful enough to prevent all this, but he does not do so. And why? Does he, perhaps, find pleasure in evil? By no means. To entertain such a thought, even for a moment, dear Chris-

tians, would be blasphemy, for God, being infinitely good, hates everything evil. Or is God, perchance, indifferent to the weal and woe of the just, when he permits them to be oppressed and persecuted by the unjust? No, on the contrary, he loves the just as a father loves his children, and he desires their happiness. Or, does he permit the wicked to do evil, that later on, they may become victims of his avenging justice? By no means. He wills not that any should perish, but that all should return to justice. 2, Pet. 3: 9. God permits evil because he has created man a free agent, because he has endowed man with free will. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hands of his own counsel. Before man is life and death, good and evil: that which he shall choose shall be given him; for the wisdom of God is great, and he is strong in power." Eccles. 15: 14—19. If God saw fit to prevent every evil in the world, it would be equivalent to taking away man's free will, and if man had not the free exercise of his will, neither virtue nor vice could be imputed to him as of merit or demerit. Neither could heaven be given him, hereafter, as a reward,—for, without liberty of will, there is no merit, and without merit, no reward.—How rash and foolish, then, are those, who complain of God, because he permits so many sins and crimes to be committed! They might just as well say: "Why does God permit me to live longer to serve him and acquire merits? why does he not at once admit me into heaven?" If the wicked man abuse his liberty of will, it is his own personal concern, he shall suffer for it severely enough; but it is our concern, dear Christians, to so use our free will for good, as to merit for ourselves eternal salvation.

*2. God does not, however, permit the wicked man to fully attain his ends.* Herod sought the life of the Child. For this purpose, he had recourse to hypocrisy in addressing the Wise Men of the East; for he told them that they should diligently search after the Child, and when they had found him, that they should bring him word again, that he also might come and adore him. For this same reason, he decreed the slaughter of the Holy Innocents at Bethlehem. But did he accomplish his design? No. God permitted the crimes of Herod, to the end that he should not be deprived of his free will, but he would not permit him, in this instance, to accomplish his wicked design; he was not suffered to harm a hair of the divine Child's head.

How many examples of this wonderful providence of God could be adduced! What did not the infidels do in France, nearly a century ago, in order to extirpate the Catholic faith. They spread broadcast over the land their godless papers and books, in which everything that is sacred to a Christian, was most shamelessly vilified and ridiculed; wherever they had power, they persecuted the bishops and priests and all their faithful followers,—confiscating their property, imprisoning them, and bringing them to

the guillotine; whoever gave shelter to a priest was doomed to die; religion was abolished, and unbelief was made the law of the land. The infidels gloried in their triumph, for they believed they had attained their impious end. But how were they not deceived! After a few years, the whole structure of infidelity which they had erected with such pains and labor and cruelty, tumbled down like a house built of cards, and the Church flourished more gloriously than ever. Thus, "God disappoints the deceitful practices of the wicked." Prov. 10: 3.

And hence, we need not fear, dear brethren, that the unjust shall ever permanently triumph over the just. The glory of the sinner lasts only a short time, and he can never completely compass the end of his unholy designs and schemes. This should be our comfort in all the trials and persecutions which the Church and her faithful followers endure in the present, and shall have to endure in the future, till the divine mission of the former be accomplished, and the close of her career on earth be announced by the Archangel's trumpet.

*3. God causes good to proceed from evil.* It is in the power of man to abuse the gift of free will and to do wrong, but he is not master of the consequences of the wrong he does. Man has his own time, and God has his. As soon as the evil is done, God begins to act, and, in his infinite mercy and wisdom, he so disposes it that good may come out of the evil done by man. Herod, whose death is mentioned in the Gospel of this day, had slain hundreds of innocent children. This was a horrible crime, crying to heaven for vengeance. But, by the ordinance of God, did not good result from the evil? All those children wear the martyr's crown in heaven; whereas, if they had lived, many of them (together with the vast multitude of the unbelieving Jews), might have been eternally lost. Moreover, by the massacre of the holy Innocents, it became universally known that the Messiah, the Desired of nations, was really born at last in Bethlehem of Juda, and this knowledge must have been a great comfort to all those just souls who, like the patriarchs and prophets, longed for the advent of the Redeemer. Indeed, we may piously suppose that many of the fathers and mothers of these little martyrs, having learned after the cruel deed was done, that it was for Christ's sake their little innocent ones were slain, we may piously suppose, dear brethren, that those afflicted parents were drawn in the end to believe in him as the promised Messiah. Herod compelled the Holy Family to flee into Egypt. This, taken in itself, was also a great sin. But, again, the blessed consequences of the sin were beyond the guilty control or conception of the sinner; for, I think, we do not err in believing that the protracted sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt opened the eyes of many idolaters to the light of Christ, and brought them to the knowledge of the true God. We perceive, then, that God in his infinite wisdom, can make good result from evil. How appropriately

Joseph of Egypt could say to his brethren: "You thought evil against me, but God turned it into good." Gen. 50: 20. From this, however, it does not follow that we should sanction sin, or look upon it as something desirable,—on the contrary, we must hate and detest it above all things. Sin is, and always will be, the only real evil upon earth, and every one who sins shall one day suffer for it. Herod is eternally damned, though good resulted from his crimes. In fact, in the eyes of God, sin is so great an evil that it requires, as it were, all the resources of his infinite power and wisdom to prevent its dreadful consequences, and to draw good from it for his own glory and man's salvation. We should, therefore, dear Christians, work with all our might to prevent the smallest sin against the good God, to put a stop to scandals, and to edify our fellow-men by good example.

Wonderful and inscrutable are the ways of divine Providence! God does not ward off all dangers from the just, he only warns them of their approach. Often he appears to have forgotten his chosen ones. He allows them, as it were, to hang on the cross, perchance, for days, for months, for years,—but in his own good time, he sends them help, and often in that darkest hour when they least expect relief. He lets the unjust have their own way for a while. He does not hinder them from abusing their free will. He permits them to plan their nefarious schemes and to carry them, to a certain extent, into execution. Yet, even when they appear to triumph in their perfidious designs, the power and the mercy of the Most High cause good to come out of evil. Let us, then, dear brethren, in every situation of life, commit ourselves with confidence to God's wise and providential guidance, and looking beyond the dark shadows of our present affliction into the golden light of that future which awaits the faithful soul, let us in every trial and tribulation cry out with the Apostle: "We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good." (Rom. 8: 28.) Amen.

J. E. ZOLLNER.

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### THE EPIPHANY.

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*"We have seen his star in the East and are come to adore him."* Matt. 2: 2.

The light of divine truth, which was prefigured by the illustrious appearance of the star of Jacob, is alone worthy of the attention and solicitude of man. By its beams our souls are enlightened, the source of true happiness is laid open to view, the solid basis, on which alone we can found our hopes, is disclosed, and the only lasting remedy for all our evils is revealed. This heavenly truth, alone, is the consolation of the innocent and the reprobate of the guilty; this, alone, immortalizes those who love it; ennobles the chains of those who suffer for it; and dignifies the abjection

and poverty of those who leave all to follow it; this, alone, gives birth to exalted sentiments, inspires true heroism, and forms characters, of which the world is not worthy. With what solicitude, therefore, my brethren, ought we to labor for the acquisition of such a treasure; with what resolution and zeal ought we to manifest it to others; and with what vigilance and circumspection ought we to guard it when possessed! It is astonishing, however, to observe the different impressions produced on the minds of men by the manifestation of this heavenly light. To some it is *a grateful light* which illuminates, and makes easy and agreeable the duties which it manifests. To others it is *an unwelcome light*, whose appearance creates naught save uneasiness and sorrow. To others, again, it is become *as darkness, as a thick cloud*, which spreads its gloom over those unhappy souls, and only serves to complete their blindness.

These various effects, dear Christians, are exemplified in the Gospel of this festival which I have read to you. In the Three Kings we behold men, who open their hearts to receive the light of truth with sincerity and promptness; in the Jewish priests, men who either shut their eyes, or wilfully pretend that they do not see it; and in Herod, a man who presents to us a dreadful example of obduracy and wickedness. The same effects are daily witnessed among Christians of the present time. Some few, like the Wise Men, receive with joy the resplendent treasure of divine Truth; others conceal it through perverse motives; and others, again, outrage it by their scandalous lives and irregular conduct. I will call your attention to these three sorts of people in this discourse; and from their conduct I will faithfully deduce the duties and obligations which the manifestation of the truth clearly enjoins upon all Christians, as essentially necessary to their future happiness.

I. The light of truth is manifested to all men, even to those who lead the most profligate lives; and it plainly indicates the way in which we should walk in order to fulfil the will of God. However deeply sinners may be engulfed in the abyss of sensuality and vice, their eyes are sometimes opened to the emptiness or degradation of their pursuits, to the splendid hopes which they renounce, and to the dreadful consequences which await them in the world to come. But the only effect produced by these rays of light in men of this description, is an increase of guilt; for instead of availing themselves of the proffered blessing, they shut their eyes upon it, and basely continue on in their career of vice. In the Wise Men of the Gospel, however, my brethren, we behold examples of a ready correspondence with the calls and inspirations of heaven; illustrious examples, indeed, and worthy to be proposed to the imitation of all Christians. Living, as they did, at an immense distance from the chosen people of God, they probably had no other knowledge of a Redeemer to come, than what was derived from the prophecy of Balaam, or from the communications of their forefathers with the Israelites during their captivity in the East.

These traditions, nevertheless, might naturally be supposed to have made but little impression on the minds of men, who, by their public profession of wisdom, were habituated to despise the popular and vague opinions, and to attribute them to the credulity of the ignorant. But, no sooner did the star of Jacob appear; no sooner did the secret inspirations of the Holy Spirit inform them, that that luminary denoted the birth of Jesus Christ, than they at once believed in him, and prepared to set out without delay to pay him their homage. They paused not to examine whether the apparition could be accounted for in a natural way. No time was lost in solving objections; none, in defence of so extraordinary a project. They listened not to the scoffs and derisions which a measure so unprecedented may reasonably be supposed to have drawn upon them. They cared not what might be said, or thought of them by others; they loved the truth; they saw the light that would conduct them to it; and heedless of every difficulty that attended them in the outset, regardless of the many unknown perils that might await them in the future,—like men whose wisdom and fortitude were superior to every emergency, they rejoiced at the sight of the happy omen, and immediately followed it.

Were mankind as ready in these times to open their eyes to the light of the heavenly Star, which now shines with meridian splendor over the whole universe, how different would be the condition of Christianity! But, alas! there are multitudes of Christians—I say it to our shame—there are multitudes who live in a state of uncertainty, or rather are addicted to passions which impel them to call in question the truths which condemn their disorders; and who strive for this purpose, to silence the voice of conscience, incessantly reproaching them for their folly and inconstancy. Sometimes, they assume an air of candor, and with a seeming eagerness submit their doubts to the examination of the learned. But their candor is counterfeit; they converse on the subject, not with the desire of being convinced of the truth (for of that they are already convinced), but in hope of destroying their convictions by their sophistry. I acknowledge, indeed, that real doubts on points both of morality and faith, may sometimes exist in the understanding; for illusions will frequently put on so plausible an appearance, that no little strength of discernment is required, to discover the deception. Upon these occasions, it is the duty of every one to seek advice from those who are duly appointed to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. But, then, we must make our inquiries like the Wise Men,—we must be simple and unaffected; we must desire to be enlightened and not flattered; we must seek the truth sincerely, before we can find it. But, unhappily, this method of inquiry is very uncommon among Christians; and even amongst those who have renounced the dissipations of a worldly life, there are not a few to be found, my brethren, who, I will venture to say, are frequently strangers to it. There are, in most cases, some favorite attachments, some imperfections, which keep posses-

sion of the heart, and which we refuse to relinquish. This we describe to our director in such plausible terms, that it is manifest we seek not the truth sincerely, and that we should be sorry to find it. Hence originate those habitual imperfections in virtuous men, which excite the derision of worldlings, and occasion reproaches and censures to be thrown on piety itself.

Ah! if we really loved the truth, our first solicitude would be to discover every weakness and imperfection in our souls, which is contradictory to its maxims; we would gratefully reverence the man who pointed out to us our defects, and who sought to heal the wounds which rankled in our hearts. David paid the highest honors to the prophet Nathan, because he reproved him for his crimes;—treating him during the remainder of his life as his father and deliverer. The same should be our conduct. But, alas! the man of God who dares to reprove us, immediately forfeits our esteem. As long as he remained silent in our regard, he was treated as an enlightened, prudent, charitable man; as a friend in every respect worthy of our confidence and esteem. Like the Precursor of our Lord in his remonstrances with Herod, he was listened to with pleasure as long as he did not interfere with any of our favorite passions; but, as the candor of the Baptist caused him to fall a victim to the resentment of the King, so also, no sooner does our confessor have the courage to say: "This is not lawful for you," than all his former perfections vanish instantly from our sight, and our opinion of him undergoes a complete revolution. His former zeal is now enthusiasm; his charity, ostentation, or vain complacency in censuring and opposing others; his piety, imprudence, or a cloak with which he conceals his pride; his ideas of truth, mere visionary shapes, which he has mistaken for realities. Thus, it too frequently happens that although we are interiorly convinced of the imperfect state of our souls, we cannot endure that others should openly share our convictions. Like Saul, we require that Samuel should approve in public, what we ourselves condemn in private; and, by a corruption of heart, which is, perhaps, more criminal than our actual weaknesses, we fain would quench in the minds of others that light of truth, which we cannot extinguish in our own. How few,—as you see, dear brethren,—are actuated by the same uprightness and sincerity as the royal Wise Men!

Again, the light of truth is oftentimes manifested to us without effect, because we are influenced by the impression, which the same light makes upon others. We see no reason why we should act differently from our fellow-men; why we should pursue the light of the divine Star with more eagerness than those around us. Sometimes, indeed, the clear light which it throws over our past irregularities fills us with dismay; we condemn our present disorders; we tremble at the idea of a future state; we propose to ourselves a change of life. But, no sooner is our attention engaged by the example of universal corruption before us, than we resist the heavenly

monitor, and ask with some surprise, whether heaven is to be purchased at a dearer rate by us, than it is by other people. We will not believe that the Christian is bound to close his eyes to the depraved ways of the world, and open them only to the duties and obligations of his calling. We will not believe that we shall inevitably lose our souls, if we live like the generality of men; that is, if we are conformed to the world, and are distinguished in nothing from the world. This is, because we will not believe that the world is already judged, and that it is the great Antichrist which shall inevitably perish, together with its head and members. Ah! how many timid Christians are there, who dare not declare for heaven, because their change of life would be condemned by public example! How many, like Aaron in the desert, dance around the Golden Calf, and offer incense to an idol which they detest, merely, because they have not courage to stand alone in defence of truth! Senseless, as we are, we look up to men, as if men were the personified truth; and, as if we were to seek on earth, and not in heaven, (like the Wise Men,) the light and law, which ought to be our guide.

Small, indeed, is the number of those who, having discovered the truth, remain perseveringly faithful to its illuminations; and, thenceforth, are dead to the world, to its empty pleasures, and to its vain pomps. Small, indeed, is the number of those, who find no delight but in the truth, and who make it their consolation in affliction, the end and recompense of all their labors, their chief and only solid enjoyment in this place of exile. How truly vain, puerile, and disgusting is the world, with all its momentary pleasures, to the man, who is enamored of the truth of the eternal promises, who is convinced, that all is unworthy of him which is not of God; and that those who find the earth their land of consolation, are those unhappy ones who will perish eternally. Nothing can delight such a man, but the prospect of immortal goods; nothing can fix his attention, but what will last forever; nothing can engage his affections, but that which he can enjoy eternally.

II. It is the duty, therefore, of every Christian to open his eyes to the light of truth with sincerity, submission, and joy. But this is not all; after we are enlightened, we are bound to diffuse the light abroad, for the benefit of our fellow creatures. And so obligatory is this duty, that if our neighbor be confirmed in his bad habits, either by our silence, by our bad example, or by our mean adulations, we become partakers of his sins, and shall be held responsible for them before the tribunal of the great Judge. An instance of such criminal behavior is recorded, for our instruction, in this day's Gospel. The Jewish priests and doctors were fully acquainted with the circumstances foretold by the prophets, concerning the birth of Christ; and, therefore, when consulted by Herod, they were bound to return an answer expressive of the whole truth. But what, my brethren, do we find to be their reply? They simply point out the place assigned for the birth

of the expected Messiah, but cravenly conceal every other circumstance connected with it. They neither proclaim the happy tidings to the people, nor invite them by their own example to pay their homage to the new-born King. Restrained by their criminal timidity, they dissembled the truth of God, even to their own condemnation.

The obligation of publishing the truth is imposed on all Christians. But alas! by whom is it fulfilled? We imagine that no defence is required from us, when the children of error espouse the cause of the world in our presence; when they justify its maxims and abuses; when they call in question the severity of the Gospel precepts; blaspheme what they do not understand; and assume the office of judges over that law by which they themselves, hereafter, will be judged. To be silent on these occasions is to take part with the enemies of truth. For, to what purpose has God enlightened us? Was it exclusively for our own individual salvation? Far from it! His designs were of much wider extent. He enlightened us in order that our words and example might correct, or at least reprove, the irregularities of our relatives, friends, masters, servants, and neighbors. The blessings which he has bestowed on us, are intended to redound to the benefit of the country of which we are inhabitants, and the age in which we live. He never raises up a vessel of election without having in view the salvation or condemnation of many. He made us lights for the express purpose that we might shine in the midst of the surrounding darkness; that we should perpetuate the knowledge of his truths among our fellow-men, and give testimony to the wisdom and justice of his law, in opposition to the prejudices and vanities of a profane world.

I acknowledge, indeed, that there is a time for speaking, and a time for silence, and that there are limits beyond which an ill-directed zeal would become imprudence. But I am shocked at the idea, that men who know and serve God, should be afraid of espousing the cause of truth when they hear the maxims of religion vilified, the good name of their neighbors injured, and the most criminal abuses of the world maintained and justified. I am shocked at the idea, that the world should have its declared partisans, and that no one should dare to proclaim himself the partisan of Jesus. Ah! the truly just man is far uplifted above every wordly consideration; his eye is fixed on heaven alone; the approbation of God is his only ambition; he fears nothing but remorse of conscience; he has respect for nothing but truth and justice; he was placed on earth, in order to give testimony to the truth, and to that he will give testimony in the face of the whole world. The presence, alone, of the truly just man is calculated to impose silence on the most embittered enemies of piety; his venerable appearance compels them to respect the broad seal of truth, which is stamped upon his forehead; to stand in awe of his dignified intrepidity; and to pay homage, at least, by their silence and confusion, to that virtue which they refuse to imitate. The Israelites, my brethren, were awed and confounded by Moses in this

manner in the midst of their profane dances and rejoicings around the Golden Calf; and they instantly ceased their idolatrous worship, at the appearance of the man of God, descending from the mountain, armed only with the terrors of the law of the Lord, and of his eternal truths. Take courage, then, espouse boldly the cause of the Most High, and suffer no species of irreligion to reign triumphant in your presence.

III. It was my design to call your attention to the conduct of the impious Herod after the departure of the Wise Men, and to prove to you, at large, that an infinite number of Christians are animated at the present time by the same spirit of persecution with which the wicked King was actuated on that occasion; but on this head, I shall make only one reflection. I speak not here of persecution by the sword, for that ordeal is now unknown amongst Christian brethren; but I allude to persecutions by scandal: and of these, the disasters are widely extended and destructive, indeed. It is not improbable that you, yourselves, may come under this class of persecutors, although you have not, as yet, thrown off the reins of morality, nor given yourselves up to a reprobate sense.

The scandal which is given by the declared advocate of vice, my dear brethren, is undoubtedly great; but the scandal which is given by the imperfect Christian, is frequently more pernicious in its effects. If, therefore, you fulfil your duties with exterior marks of tepidity; if you attempt to unite the service of the world with that of Jesus Christ; if you pretend to a life of piety, and, at the same time, follow the maxims of worldlings, you are persecutors of the truth; because, by your example, you confirm the calumnies which are invented against the truly virtuous, and cause holiness itself to be blasphemed by sinners. You cast a shadow over the beauties of truth; you make it appear repulsive to those who are disposed to embrace it; and you encourage the impenitence of those who are ready to seize the smallest pretext for deferring their conversion. In this country, particularly, surrounded as you are, by men who are separated from the Church and temple of the Lord, you cause the words of the prophet Jeremy to be again fulfilled: "The unfaithful Israel hath justified her soul in comparison of the treacherous Juda," (Jer. 3: 2.) The unfaithful Israel, that is, your unbelieving neighbor, beholding in you, (the heirs of God's promises,) the same thirst after pleasures, the same love of the world, the same vanities and follies as in himself,—turns away with disgust from your affectation of religion, and concludes that it matters not which, or what manner of, faith he outwardly professes, since the moral conduct of all is the same. Let me, therefore, exhort you, dear brethren, with the Apostle, so to regulate your deportment in the eyes of men, that, instead of ranking you among the workers of evil, they may be edified by the display of your good works; and may open their hearts to the inspirations of God when, in his mercy, he vouchsafes to visit them with his graces. Impose silence on the enemies of your religion by the innocence of your lives; convince

the world that your piety is useful for all things; that it not only contains the sure prospect of future happiness, but that it imparts a present peace and tranquillity of mind, the only pleasures worthy of enjoyment in this transitory life.

Let us, therefore, give glory to the truth, my brethren, and for this purpose, let us receive it with joy, like the Wise Men, the instant it is manifested to us; and never let us outrage it, like Herod, by the imperfections and irregularities of our lives. Then, after having walked in its light during the time of our mortal pilgrimage here below,—we shall be all, hereafter, eternally sanctified together in truth, and consummated in charity. Amen.

MASSILLON.

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### THE EPIPHANY.

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*“Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem.” Matt. 2: 1.*

Three Wise Men came from the East, seeking the new-born King, saying: “Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to adore him.” These three men were the first, that were called from the darkness of paganism to the light of faith. They are the first fruits of the Gentiles, the first disciples of the Gospel. We cannot doubt that God would exhibit to us, in these first fathers of Christianity, a perfect example for our imitation. Let us, then, follow them on their way; let us mark all their steps, whilst they are making search for Jesus, in order to learn from them, how we, in our turn, are to seek him. Let us, my brethren, consider the obstacles, which they courageously overcome. Their first obstacle is themselves; their second, their fellow-men; and their third, the world. They, themselves, might naturally hinder this great quest by their corrupt inclinations and passions; their fellow-men, by their example; and the world, by its hollow promises and false pleasures. But seeking Jesus earnestly and unselfishly, they do not suffer themselves to be impeded in their course by any of these obstacles or allurements.

I. The Wise Men came from the East to Jerusalem to seek the new-born King. The first obstruction in their path was, (as might be supposed,) the affections of their own hearts. What had they not to abandon, what sacrifices had they not to make, for the Infant Messiah whom they seek! They leave all that they tenderly love, their native land, their palaces, their families; in short, everything that is near and dear to them. They must undertake a long and laborious journey, sacrificing the conveniences and

comforts of their country and their homes.—This is the first thing which Christ requires of his disciples,—detachment of the heart from the things of this world: “He that does not leave father and mother, brother and sister for my sake, is not worthy of me.” God cannot be satisfied with a heart that is divided between him and his creatures. Nor is this exterior disengagement enough; this is merely the shell; we must go farther; we must courageously *abandon ourselves*,—a detachment harder to effect than the sacrifice of all our possessions and temporal goods. We must give up our own will and make it conformable to the will of God. It would be very easy to be a Christian, if we had not to subdue our corrupt inclinations and bridle our passions. The name we bear, requires far more; it demands the painful separation of our hearts from all created things. We must renounce what is dear to our inclinations, and bring our ruling passions into subjection; break the fetters that bind our hearts to creatures, and do violence to ourselves in many other ways.

And this is what appears so hard to corrupt nature; this is the first stumbling-block in our way, which self-love magnifies and exaggerates. It persuades us that total self-abnegation is an undertaking surpassing our strength, and that we cannot persevere in it for any length of time. Our self-love does not object to devoting a small portion of each day to prayer, or to the practice of certain external austerities which are not very painful to flesh and blood, provided we spare the heart, the inner man, and are not called upon to lay the axe to the root of our passions. In all these devotional exercises, we are generally very exact, even scrupulous, as if everything depended upon them; but in fighting against our passions,—a struggle which demands a paramount vigor and energy,—we are slothful, inactive, nay, careless; and this, dear Christians, is a lukewarmness we must combat with all our strength, if we desire, in imitation of the Wise Men, to find the new-born King. In vain do we renovate and whitewash the exterior, if we neglect the inner man; we must search the heart and cleanse it from all inordinate desires;—we must do violence to ourselves. And we must make the measure and sincerity of this violence our criterion, as to whether or not, we are advancing towards union with God; for we are certainly deluded by the evil one if, without self-denial, we congratulate ourselves upon having found the way of the Lord. If we wish to take the path that leads to God, we must make many and great sacrifices for the love of him; and we are only able to determine that the road we travel is the right one in so far as we are thus doing violence to ourselves and our inclinations; the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and only the violent bear it away.

II. The Wise Men of the East had not only to make many personal sacrifices in order to come to Jesus, but they had also to guard against the example of others, so as not to be led astray by it. When I speak of the

example of others, I allude to that most cruel enemy and tyrant of man,—human respect,—which especially in our days, my brethren, prevents Christians from making any progress in the ways of God; but these royal pilgrims who came from the East to Jerusalem, to seek the new-born King, did not fear that tyrant. They departed from their homes, unaccompanied by those many other wise and learned men, their friends and relations, who (despising the apparition of the Star,) stayed at home. These three Magi, alone, follow the miraculous luminary which conducts them to Jerusalem. They arrive there, and in the presence of Herod, they ask: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Without any sign of fear, they declare that they have come to adore him. They do not seek the opinion of Herod, neither do they regard his wrath, nor the murmurs of the Pharisees; they do not consider what others may say or think of them. They, themselves, can think or speak of nothing else save the new-born King. Undaunted, they will not permit themselves to be prevented from rendering to their God, the homage and adoration due him.

Yes, the example of others is the great stumbling-block, the giant obstacle, which these three primitive confessors of our holy faith happily surmounted, but against which *we* frequently stumble, and are cast by it into sin. The lights of heaven are not wanting to point out to us the way we should go. But, beholding the example of others who live as we do, we endeavor to stifle the voice of conscience, and are content to continue in the same state as our careless companions, and, thus proceed, hand in hand with them, in the path of error. We have, indeed, some lucid intervals, in which we acknowledge that we are going astray and rushing headlong to perdition; we pronounce judgment against ourselves; we tremble at the thought of eternity, we make resolutions to begin a new life, but as soon as we enter again into society, and observe that all around us pursue the same course as ourselves, we relapse, once more, into the unhappy sleep of impenitence. We console ourselves with the thought, that it is hardly possible the great masses of men should be, with ourselves, upon the wrong road, and doomed to be eternally lost. Either we cannot, or will not, believe that the surest road to hell is *to live as others live*; and through human respect, follow the vast multitude to perdition.

The greatest obstacle, therefore, in the way of salvation is the example of others, which we have not the courage to oppose. We are not strong enough to side with the pious minority who are good and fear God, because we are afraid that the world, whose homage and respect we crave, might disapprove of our change of life and ridicule us. Yes, we frequently take part with the wicked, even against our own judgment, against the voice of our conscience, sooner than run the risk of offending them. Aaron certainly found no pleasure in idolatry, and, if he had followed and obeyed the dictates of his heart and conscience, would have adored the One True God; but he had not sufficient courage to oppose the multitude of the

wicked,—consequently, he fell into idolatry, danced with the rest of the Israelites around the Golden Calf, and offered sacrifice with them to an idol, which in his heart he detested and despised. As long as we are the slaves of human respect, we are not true followers of Christ. We must not heed the taunts and scoffs of men, but, in our dignity as Christians, consider ourselves superior to their ignorant remarks. They cannot injure our souls by their tongues, and though they were even able to destroy our bodies, let us not fear them, but rather him who can destroy both body and soul, and render them miserable in the flames of a never-ending Eternity. If, with the Wise Men of the Gospel, we sincerely wish to find Jesus Christ and the way to his Kingdom, let us not fear the judgment of the wicked, for, with the wicked, good is evil, and evil, good; and, thus, turning light into darkness, they have no other guide for their judgment than their own depraved inclinations.

III. The third obstacle to the Wise Men's journey, (the mastery of which includes so many of their noble sacrifices, but which they consider as nothing, compared with the possession of their God,) is the concupiscence of the eyes,—the allurements of earth, riches, grandeur, luxuries, and all the enticing and ensnaring things of this world. What a temptation for these three oriental magnates! They come into a foreign country and behold the glory of Jerusalem, its splendid buildings, the magnificent Temple of Solomon, the rich palace of Herod. They regard all these things with little attention, without betraying the least sign of astonishment. They do not ask, as did the embassy from Babylon before them, to see the treasures and riches of the Temple, and the curiosities of the city;—no, they care nothing for worldly pomp and splendor; because they have Jesus in their hearts and thoughts, they are indifferent to all other things.

They only ask for Christ: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” And as soon as they ascertain the place of his birth, they turn their backs upon the glorious city of Jerusalem, and go to the mean stable in which he was born. There, they find the Infant Messiah, the only object of their love and desire. They are not scandalized at his humble surroundings, but falling on their knees, they adore the Divine Child, and opening their treasures, they offer him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Here, at Bethlehem, and not at Jerusalem, they find consolation and unspeakable happiness.

This is the picture of a true Christian. He lives in the world, enjoys the goods and, occasionally, the pleasures of the world, but all this completes not his happiness; his heart is not attached to terrestrial things; it belongs to God, whole and entire. He has, as it were, no eyes for the world and its empty vanities; he finds no real pleasure in anything but in God. God, alone, is his comfort and consolation in all difficulties, God is the only joy and pleasure of his heart, he knows that what is not God, is

unworthy of his love. Nothing is able to charm him but that which presents to him an eternal good, nothing engages his consideration but that eternal good; nothing pleases him, but what can please him forever; and nothing is able to attract his heart and affections except the treasure which he can never lose, but shall possess and enjoy forever. These are the marks and qualities by which true Christians are known. With the three Wise Men, they seek God with their whole heart. Nothing can prevent their search for the Eternal Truth; neither the passions of the heart, for they subdue them; nor the example of others, for they are guided, not by human respect or bad example, but by the noble principles of the Gospel; and as to the allurements of the world, they can have no power over the hearts which are not attached to them. Follow, then, the footsteps of the Wise Men of the East; imitate their beautiful example,—to the end, my dear brethren, that you may be so happy as to find with them, without fail, Christ, our only hope in this life and our permanent felicity in the next. Amen.

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### FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN TO THEIR PARENTS.

*“And he was subject to them.” Luke 2: 51.*

Jesus Christ came,—so says the inspired Writer,—“to do and to teach.” By his actions, he has instructed,—by his words, he has taught us—all that we must do in order to save our souls, those immortal souls, my dear brethren, for which he laid down his life, shedding the last drop of his sacred Blood upon the cruel cross of Golgotha. He came into the world not to do his own will, but the will of his heavenly Father who sent him. Submissive to that holy will, he recognized and adored it even when unjustly condemned to death by Pilate—yea, even when nailed to the cross by the hands of his brutal executioners. In to-day’s Gospel, as you have heard, dear friends, we read that from infancy to manhood, he was obedient to Mary, his Mother, and to Joseph, his foster-father: “he was subject to them,” says the inspired word of St. Luke, the Evangelist. Until his thirtieth year, when his heavenly Father called him to begin his public life, he lived with them at Nazareth, and as a child loved, honored, respected, and obeyed them. This love and respect for his blessed Mother caused him to work his first miracle, even although, as he said at the time, his hour had not yet come; and, moreover, when he was in his last agony on the cross, mindful of her future interests, he recommended her to the care of the beloved disciple, St. John. My dear children here present, of whatever age, of whatever condition in life you may be, learn from Jesus

your duties to your parents; learn, to-day, especially, that whatever may be the failings of your father or mother, whatever your own circumstances in life, or your position in society, you are bound to love and honor your parents, as long as they live; nay, even after they have departed to another world, your love for them should not cease, but should find expression in Masses, prayers, and alms for their eternal repose. You perceive, my dear friends, that the subject on which I intend to speak to you, to-day, is a subject of the most vital importance, especially in these times, when respect for parents and parental authority is so often disregarded, and when children seem to forget or ignore the duty of love, honor, and respect, which they owe continually to their father and mother. Leaving the subject of obedience for another occasion, I shall explain to you, to-day, my dear brethren,

*I. How children must love;*

*II. How children must honor and respect their parents.*

I. It may appear superfluous and almost out of place, to speak of the necessity of loving one's parents, inasmuch as our dear Lord has explicitly said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Our parents, forsooth, hold by right, the first place amongst those designated by the title of "neighbor." Were it not a fact, my dear brethren, a sad and shocking fact, that, from time to time, we meet unhappy sons and daughters, who are themselves grown-up men and women, and, possibly, parents in their turn—were it not that we hear them say: "I cannot love my mother. I almost hate my father!" assuredly, I would be silent, to-day, on this sad subject. It may be true, indeed, that parents, forgetful of their duties toward those with whose welfare they are especially charged, are more or less to be blamed for alienating from themselves the affections of their children; granted, also, as it sometimes happens, that a father by his unchristian life, by his brutal conduct, causes his children to become outcasts in the world; or that a mother, by her nameless vices, degrades and disgraces her offspring; still the duty of love, filial love, should not thereby suffer nor grow cold in the heart of a Christian child. The outward tokens of affection, the exterior manifestations of that love (which is so natural that it can scarcely be eradicated from the heart of a child) may, indeed, be prudently moderated and withheld for a season, but the love itself should increase in proportion as a parent's misfortunes become greater. Perhaps you will say: "I cannot love my father, for he is subject to bad habits; he uses the vilest language; he does not treat us as a father, he abuses us," and the like. I answer: "My child, you are mistaken: you *do* love your father. Would you not be willing to give almost anything, if you could prevail on him to renounce that bad habit,—if you could have the pleasure of seeing him approach the Sacraments, and become a good Christian?"

You reply: "Yes, Father, God knows that I would." Hence, I repeat that you *do* love him—you love him with your *will*, if not with your sensible feelings,—but you must let your love become more effective;—you must pray constantly for the conversion of your father; pray that God may touch his heart and give him the grace to change his life. No, no, it is not possible that a child should not love its parents, for, as St. Peter Chrysologus says: "A child that does not love its parents, is rather a monster of nature than a child." And I would not for a moment suspect any of you, my dear brethren, of having fallen so low as to refuse to those who, under God, are the authors of your existence, what the very brutes, by natural instinct, give to those that have brought them into the world. O, how terrible are the threats of the Almighty God against such unnatural children! "He that curseth his father or mother, dying, let him die." Lev. 20: 9. And, again, in the book of Proverbs, we read: "He that curseth his father and mother, his lamp shall be put out in the midst of darkness. The inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning, in the end shall be without a blessing." Prov. 20: 20, 21. For such unholy maledictions and desires, proceeding from an unnatural hatred and evil disposition towards his parents, draw down the curse of God upon the unfortunate child. Their lamp is often extinguished "in the midst of darkness," that is, such unhappy sons and daughters are frequently cut off from the face of the earth in the midst of their sins. As I have already said, I trust, that no one here present is guilty of such unnatural conduct towards his father or mother, and, therefore, I shall dwell no longer upon this first part of to-day's instruction, but proceed to my second point, namely:

II. *That children must honor and respect their parents.* "He that honoreth his mother is as one, that layeth up a treasure. He that honoreth his father, shall have joy in *his own* children; and in the day of his prayer, he shall be heard. He that honoreth his father, shall enjoy a long life; and, he that obeyeth the father, shall be a comfort to his mother. He that feareth the Lord, honoreth his parents, and will serve them as his masters that brought him into the world. Honor thy father, in work and word, and all patience, that a blessing may come upon thee from him, and his blessing may remain in the latter end." Eccles. 3: 5-12.

"Honor thy father and mother that thou mayest live a long time, and it may be well with thee in the land which the Lord, thy God, will give thee." Deut. 5: 16. Thus spoke the Almighty God in the Old Law to his chosen people. "Honor thy father and mother," says our blessed Lord in his counsels to the Scribes and Pharisees, and, again, to the young man who was called to the perfect life, but had not the courage to embrace holy poverty. This, alone, my brethren, should be, indeed, sufficient to teach children that it is their imperative duty, at all times and under all circum-

stances, to pay respect to him whom God has chosen from among all men to be their father, and to her who, in pain and at the peril of her own life, has brought them into the world. Children, where would you be, what would have become of you, if your parents had abandoned you after your birth? Who would ever have cared for you if they, at that supreme hour, had cast you off? When you were unable of yourself to think, to speak, to move, those loving parents nursed you; they provided for you, they watched over you, night and day. This caused the good old Tobias to impress upon the mind and heart of his son the duty of respect for his mother. When about to die, he said: "Hear, my son, the words of my mouth, and lay them as a foundation in thy heart. When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body; and thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life. For thou must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee in her womb." Tob. 4: 2, 3, 4. And your father, dear children, how does he not labor and toil for your good? No fatigue, nor anxiety of mind, either by day or by night, does he count as anything, when your welfare, or even your comfort, is in question; for nature impels him to provide for you and to take care of you. And would it not be unnatural, if you should refuse to honor and respect them who are in your behalf the immediate representatives of God?

Since, then, the Almighty has expressly commanded it,—since nature itself clearly impels you to honor your parents,—O, my dear children, whosoever you may be, whatsoever your age or position in life, do not, I beg of you, under any pretext, deny them the love and respect, which are their lawful due. At all times, but especially when your father has grown old and peevish, when your mother, pressed down by age and infirmities, can no longer help herself, show your respect for your parents. Complain not of the burden, speak not harshly to them, nor wound their feelings by pert and unbecoming language, by sullen silence, angry looks, or violent and hasty gestures. "Son, support the old age of thy father; and grieve him not in his life; and if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not, when thou art in thy strength; for the relieving of the father shall not be forgotten." Eccles. 3: 14, 15. But, above all, never speak of their faults and imperfections to others, mindful of the words of the Holy Ghost: "Glory not in the dishonor of thy father; for his shame is no glory to thee." Eccles. 3: 12.

If, however, neither the admonitions of the Holy Ghost, the positive commandment of God, nor the promises vouchsafed to the dutiful child be sufficient to induce you to honor your father and mother; if, carried away by your unruly passions of self-love and pride, you look down upon your parents with scorn and contempt, and insult them by your ungovernable tongue, hear, then, what the vengeance of God has in store for you: "Cursed be he who honoreth not his father and mother; and all the people shall say amen." Deut. 27: 16. The child, the young man or woman, who

tails to cherish and manifest a proper regard for his parents, who treats his father harshly, or who so forgets his manhood and his Christianity, as to wound the feelings of his aged mother, that child shall be cursed by God, even in this world. The maledictions of heaven shall rest upon undutiful children wherever they go, and shall descend like a mildew upon whatever they undertake, even as it was in the case of Cham, the disrespectful son of Noah. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and that despiseth the labor of his mother in bearing him, let the ravens of the brook pick it out, and the young eagles eat it." Prov. 30: 17. On the other hand, heaven's choicest blessings shall accompany the child, who, after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, shall at all times be guided by the command of God: "Honor thy father and mother." Imitate, my brethren, those whom the Holy Ghost, in the Sacred Scriptures, points out to us as beautiful examples of filial respect and love; and the blessing of God will ever be upon your life; and your days, according to his sacred promise, will be long in the land.

In conclusion, I wish to call your attention, my dear brethren, to the beautiful manner, in which king Solomon treated his mother, Betsabee. Solomon was not a saint, neither was his mother. And, yet, that mighty king, who had been endowed by Almighty God with greater wisdom than was ever possessed by any one before or after his time,—that famous monarch rose from his throne, when his mother came into his royal presence, and, with due respect for her office and authority, bade her ask of him whatever she desired. Would to God that children were ever mindful of this beautiful example given them by the wisest of men! They would not, then, by word or action, wound the tender heart of the mother who bore them in her womb, they would not sadden the heart of their father, pressed down by old age and infirmities; but rather, like Solomon, they would hearken with filial reverence to their mother's smallest request; and, with Joseph of Egypt, provide for the comfort and support of their father's declining years. Uphold, then, dear children, the tottering steps of your aged parents, and the blessing which God has promised to those who honor their father and mother, will most assuredly follow you in life, and dying, you will meet your Judge with confidence, and will receive from him, who was subject to Mary and Joseph at Nazareth, the everlasting reward which he has prepared for the imitators of his own filial love and devotion. Amen.

FAX.

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON CONTRITION FOR THE LOSS OF JESUS, AND AN EARNEST RESOLUTION TO  
SEEK HIM WHERE HE CAN BE FOUND.

*“Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Luke 2: 48.*

Who can wonder at the anguish and grief of Mary and Joseph, on this occasion, beholding them hastily return to Jerusalem to seek their lost Son, and hearing the mournful complaint and gentle reproach of the Immaculate Mother: “Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Was not the lost Child worthy of this tearful and painful search? What did Mary and Joseph lose by losing Jesus? They lost the riches of their house, the joy of their hearts, the expectation of mankind, and the Saviour of the world. O, what shame to sinners! We call ourselves Christians and followers of Christ, and yet, having lost him and his grace, can we be so indifferent? We have no sorrow for his loss; nor do we endeavor to find him again. We appear to be unconscious of having lost anything worth possessing. Behold, if we live blamelessly in the fear and love of God, we possess Jesus, and are his dwelling place; but, as soon as we fall into mortal sin, he departs from us and deprives us of his grace and favor. Mary and Joseph did not lose Jesus through any fault of theirs; they innocently supposed him to be in the company of their kinsfolk and acquaintances, who had left Jerusalem before them; but, *we*, by committing sin, we lose him and his grace wilfully, consequently through our own fault, and how can we be indifferent to such a loss? The greatness of this misfortune should move us,

- I. To be sorry for having lost Jesus;*
- II. To seek Jesus where he can alone be found.*

I. If you wish to understand the greatness of the loss you sustain by committing mortal sin, reflect upon what you lose when you lose Jesus, what you are without him and his grace. What are all the riches you may possess in this world, what are all the pleasures you may enjoy, and all the praises men may heap upon you? Ah, they are vain things, they are glittering toys, which will soon vanish; they are vile, miserable trifles which you may lose any moment, or which, at most, will only attend you to the grave. If, in the possession of the goods of this world and in the enjoyment of the pleasures of this life, you cannot say: “Jesus is my friend, his

grace is with me; he loves me, and I love him,”—you are the most miserable of beings. A beggar who can glory in having God for his friend, is far more acceptable in the eyes of God than the king in his palace, if the latter be a sinner. He that glories, let him glory in the Lord,—to glory in anything else is but vanity of vanities.

If God possesses our souls, we are truly happy; if we possess Jesus, we may glory in our Guest. Whilst we abstain from sin, God dwells within us. “Know you not that your members are temples of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?” This our Lord would give us to understand when he says: “If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make an abode with him.” If we keep his commandments, if we are zealous in his service, what are we but a temple in which he dwells, a throne on which he reigns, granting all our requests and showering upon us the treasures of his grace? Is he not our strength in weakness, our refuge in temptations, our light in darkness and in doubt? Is he not the life of our lives, the understanding of our understandings, and the soul of our souls? And when we lose Jesus and his grace, what is it but Jesus leaving his temple, the King descending from his throne, and the Bridegroom abandoning his bride! I am aware that people weep, when their friends remove a great distance from them, that children weep, when they behold their good father, or their tender mother, laid in the coffin and hidden in the grave; that parents weep when their children die, and are buried out of their sight. But what will you do, when, on account of one unhappy grievous sin, your Jesus, your God and your All, has departed from you, and left you without his precious grace? Have you no tears for the loss of your God? Is too much required of you, when I implore you to give vent to those bitter drops of anguish, and to exclaim with the Royal Prophet: “My tears have been my bread, both day and night, whilst it is said to me: Where is thy God?” Ask *Sampson* what he lost, when he abandoned God? He lost his strength; he who had been invincible, became as weak and powerless as a child. Ask King *Saul* what he lost, when he turned his back upon God? He will tell you, that he lost his kingdom. Ask *Manasses* what he lost when he was unfaithful to God, and he will tell you that he lost his crown. Ask the *children of Israel* what they lost by sinning against God? They lost the health of their bodies, the fertility of their fields, the possession of their country, and their national independence; yet, all these losses are but feeble figures of a dreadful reality,—they are as nothing compared with the loss of Jesus and his grace. We are exceedingly happy and possess everything as long as we possess Jesus and his grace. By committing mortal sin, we lose everything; we have no more strength in difficulties, or patience in troubles and afflictions; for Jesus is our strength, our hope, our comfort, and our consolation. Sinners, you have reason to curse those unhappy hours in which you lost Jesus,—Jesus and his grace,—and to cry out in the bitterness of your souls:

"My tears are my bread, day and night, whilst it is said to me: Where is thy God?"

Look back upon the blessed period of your past innocence,—how happy, how contented, how cheerful, you were in those days when your conscience did not reproach you with anything; when you were free from sin and full of zeal and fervor in the service of God; when you practised all the Christian virtues with ease and pleasure; when your souls were pure and undefiled; when Jesus was your friend, and you, the objects of his favor and pleasure! How happy were you, dear Christians, on the day of your first Communion! Oh! how can you be free now from anxiety? What do you think of yourselves, seeing, that you are in the state of mortal sin, that your souls are corrupted with evil, and the just objects of his anger and indignation? Once more I repeat: How happy you were on the day of your first Communion! You were angels in human flesh; you would have gone straight to heaven, if you had died upon that day. But, from the moment you lost Jesus and his grace, and as long as you remained in that state without endeavoring to recover his friendship,—you resembled devils. What have you, if you do not possess Jesus, your Eternal Lord and Master? Repeat, again, with a heart full of compunction for your sins: "My tears are my bread, both day and night, whilst it is said to me: Where is thy God?"

Mary and Joseph, not finding their Son with their kinsfolk and acquaintances, immediately returned to Jerusalem. They inquired for him everywhere, and still not finding him, they went into the Temple to present their necessity and trouble to the Lord. And there they found him. What an example for us! In like manner, you must seek him without delay, as soon as you have had the misfortune to lose him by sin. The Sacred Scripture relates to us a very instructive incident by which we may learn how we are to seek him. Micha, an idolator, was one day robbed of an idol which he had made with his own hands, and which he loved very much. He no sooner discovered his loss, than he ran after the thief screaming as loud as he could. The thief stopped, asking him: "What makes you run and scream like a madman?" He answered: "Why should I not scream, and almost take leave of my senses, since you have stolen my god?" If an idolator spares no trouble to recover a senseless idol, the work of his hands, is it possible that you, Christians, can live for days, months, and even years, without possessing your God, that God, who gives motion to all that move, being to all that are, and life to all that live? Why do you put off your conversion from day to day? For what are you waiting? Why do you not endeavor to recover the grace of God which you have forfeited by your sins? Pray, tell me, is this your course of action, when you sustain a temporal loss? When the Lord visits you with sickness, do you not apply every available remedy, in order to recover the health of your body? A physician is called in at once, and his advice eagerly sought and followed. No matter, how bitter or disgusting the medicines may be, you are satis-

fied to make use of them; no matter, how painful or dangerous, the operation may prove, you consent to undergo it,—and why? Simply to recover your bodily health. But when you have lost Jesus and his grace; when your soul is in the grasp of a mortal illness, you are quiet, indifferent, careless,—you delay your conversion for months and years; consequently, I can say with justice that you are more solicitous for your corruptible bodies than for your immortal souls. The loss of worldly goods deprives you of your sleep at night, of your appetite during the day,—you have no rest, no peace. O, sinner! how can you live so long without making efforts to recover the lost grace of God, although your conscience daily cries out to you: “Where is your God?”

II. If, after the commission of sin, you are sensible, in a measure, of your great loss, your peace is disturbed; you are restless, and you try in every way to find peace. But all your endeavors to find your lost treasure will not be rewarded with success, unless you seek it where it can, alone, be found. Some seek their happiness in riches, others in honors, others in pleasures,—but are riches, honors, and pleasures the end for which man is created? In God, alone, you will find rest for your souls, peace of mind, and true happiness, because in him, alone, you will find the end for which you are placed in this world. The heart of man is not, and never can be, satisfied with the goods of this earth. The poor man is uneasy, because he is destitute of these temporal goods, but the rich man is still more uneasy in their possession. God alone is the end for which we live; if we lose him, we are really unhappy. If you wish, therefore, to find your lost happiness, you must seek it in God.

It is now nearly six thousand years since the universe was formed by the creative hand of God. Countless are the multitudes of men who have lived in the world. Among them have been many who were renowned for the superiority of their learning and talents, for the valor of their arms, and for their spirit of enterprise, but all, without exception, wished and desired nothing more than happiness. Now, tell me, if in all history you can discover one who found true happiness in anything but God. We read that Solomon was blessed with riches and endowed with great wisdom, and on that account was honored and respected by kings and queens, but, at the same time, we read in his own confession, that he was not happy, that there was nothing in his riches but vanity of vanities and affliction of spirit. We read that Alexander, the Great, placed on the highest pinnacle of human greatness, looked abroad with a heavy sigh over his vast dominions, and actually wept because there was not another world for his ambitious sword to conquer,—lamented, because he could not subjugate all nations to his sceptre. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, declared, that he possessed every thing great in this world, and that he could desire nothing not already his own, but he also said that there was something wanting to complete his happiness, although he could not explain what it was. We know what

that something is,—it is God. Without God and his grace, there is no true happiness. All other things are vanities, glittering toys, splendid trifles. The richest man is unhappy, if he does not possess God. The heart of man is made to be the abode of God, and as long as God does not dwell in it, there is naught there save emptiness and bitterness. Every one feels this, and strives to fill up that vacuum, but generally not in the right manner. God, alone, can fill our hearts, and make us contented and happy, because he is the sole end for which we are created.

O false hope of happiness, how many are deceived by thee! Man always lives in hope, and dies without seeing his fondest hopes realized. All live in expectation of acquiring felicity here below; our whole life is poisoned by this delusive hope. Therefore, my brethren, learn in time not to fix your hearts and affections upon the perishable goods of this world; so that, if you be deprived of them by any accident, you may bear their loss with a tranquil mind. Without such a disposition, you will ever be the slaves, rather than the masters, of your passions.

But where is Jesus to be found? The Gospel tells us that Mary and Joseph sought him for three days, and found him in the temple, among the doctors of the Law. As soon as they discovered their loss, they returned in tears and sorrow to the Holy City. So, also, must you return from your evil ways to the Holy City of virtue, from the flowery road that leads to hell to the narrow way of the Cross which leads to heaven. You must seek your God in the temple, in the church; there he will unite himself with you, when you receive him in holy Communion,—there he will hear your prayers, when you pour them forth to him with faith and confidence. If you seek him elsewhere, you will not find him. Mary and Joseph did not find him in the streets, but in the temple of Jerusalem. Yes, he is found in the church, in the true Temple of God; there your sins are forgiven in the sacred tribunal of Penance,—there the tremendous Sacrifice is offered,—there you receive his sacred Body and Blood. If you seek him elsewhere, you will not find him, he will say to you as he said to his Blessed Mother: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about the business of my Father?”

Once more, what do you lose by losing Jesus? You lose everything. What do you find, when you find him? Everything. What have you, if you do not possess Jesus and his holy grace? Absolutely nothing. What can you do without Jesus and his grace? Nothing, whatever. If you keep his commandments, Jesus promises you the beauty of holiness here; and real, because eternal, joys, hereafter. And the devil, under whose banners you enlist when you break the commandments, promises you the horrors of hell, a fire that will burn forever, a worm that will never die. Would you, my brethren, even for a million of dollars, be cast into a fiery furnace and burn there for a year, nay, (what do I say?) for a single hour? No, you would not. But you make a worse choice than this; you choose an

eternity of torments for a momentary pleasure, you choose rather to damn your souls by your sins, than to save them by a brief period of mortification.

Come ye all, then, who have been so unfortunate as to lose Jesus by wilful sin. He is expecting you in his boundless mercy. Your sins are not too great for pardon; the arms of Jesus are still outstretched; he invites all, without exception, to come to him that he may refresh them. O my brethren! seek him earnestly and perseveringly in the Temple,—seek him with tears and true repentance in the tribunal of Penance; and having found him, risk his loss no more, but cry out with a heart full of love: “I have found him whom I love, I will keep him and let him go no more!”

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### SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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MARY'S GOODNESS TOWARDS MAN, AND HER GREAT POWER WITH GOD.

“*Mary, the Mother of Jesus, saith to him: They have no wine.*” *John 2: 3.*

This is the petition with which Mary intercedes with her Divine Son for the wedding guests: “They have no wine.” As though she would say: Behold, my Son, the innocent joy of these good people, (in which you, yourself, participate,) will shortly be interrupted to the great embarrassment of the bride and bridegroom; for the wine begins to fail. “They have no wine.” Short as this petition may seem, it is followed by the best effects; out of regard for his Mother, our Blessed Lord changes water into wine by an act of his divine Omnipotence. This charitable condescension on the part of the divine Omnipotence is astonishing on the one hand; and on the other, the prayer of the Virgin Mother of God conveys to us a wholesome lesson, well deserving our most serious attention. Mary presents her petition to her Son with the greatest confidence, and her request is granted. By her request she shows:

- I. Her great confidence in God,*
- II. Her great goodness towards man, and*
- III. Her great power with God.*

I. The prayer of Mary to her Son teaches us with what confidence we should pray to God. Her prayer is full of confidence. This is evident from the subject of her request, from the manner of her request, and from the fact, that she lost neither courage, nor hope, because of the seemingly-unpromising answer of her Son. It is true, Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and, because of her maternal authority, she has a particular right to converse with him more freely, to intimate her wishes to him more openly, and

more confidently to expect from him the realization of her desires. She had experienced his filial love and obedience during thirty years in her humble home at Nazareth; hence, the Evangelist assures us: "He was subject to them." But, what Mary requests in the Gospel of this day, surpasses all human power; for she requests an act which God, alone, (who dwelleth in Christ with all the fulness of the Godhead corporally,) is able to perform. She asks of our Lord a sign, a miracle, never heard of before; a miracle, by which he would prove himself publicly to be the Supreme Lord of the Universe. What is her request? Is it to forgive the sins of a poor dying sinner? Is it to restore to a sorrowful widow her only son? Is it to feed hungry multitudes in the desert? Is it to heal a sick man and restore him to health? Is it to raise a dead girl to life? None of all these. Her request is to prolong the pleasure and the merriment of a newly-married couple and their guests, by procuring an increase of wine which had begun to fail, for, she says: "They have no wine." She knows that he is able to do what she desires; and she does not doubt for an instant that he will comply with her request; she does not multiply words, but simply says: "They have no wine," as if she knew, then, what her divine Son later taught: "When you are praying, do not speak many words, as the heathens do."

Jesus said to her: "Woman, what is *that* to me and to thee?" In these words, (which read to some like a reproach, but by which no reproach was intended,) he gives us to understand that he received the Godhead, which, alone, is able to work miracles, not from his Mother in time, but from his Father in eternity. His reply seems to be a denial of her request, especially, if we take into consideration what he adds: "My hour is not yet come." Is Mary afraid? Does she lose her courage, her confidence? Does she give up hope, or does she reiterate her request? No, she remains steadfast in her confidence; she is so sure that her prayer will be heard and her request granted, that she turns to the waiters, and says to them: "Whosoever he shall say to you, do ye." Let us imitate her example. We may reap a double benefit from it,—first, we shall, thus, render ourselves acceptable to the divine Mother, who is pleased to assist those whom she finds inclined to imitate her virtues; and secondly, we shall obtain of God by our prayers all that is necessary for us; for true confidence is a quality which renders prayer, as it were, all powerful. To prove this, I quote the plain words of Christ himself: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible for you," Again, he says: "Therefore, I say to you, all things whatsoever you shall ask when you pray, believe, and you shall receive." "Ask, and you shall receive." He confirms this promise with a solemn oath: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you."

Jesus always takes the faith and confidence with which we pray into

consideration, when we ask him for any favor. What else did he wish to express, when he said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." "Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." And in the ninth chapter of St. Matthew, we read: A woman who was troubled with an issue of blood for twelve years, came behind him and touched the hem of his garment; for, she said within herself: "If I but touch his garment, I shall be healed." But Jesus, turning about, said: "Take courage, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole." Again, two men followed him, crying aloud: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!" and Jesus said to them: "Do you believe, that I can do this unto you?" They said: "Yea, Lord." He touched their eyes, saying: "According to your faith be it done unto you." Sometimes he even feigned not to hear the prayer addressed to him, either to try the confidence of the suppliant, to confirm it, or to manifest it more clearly to those present; for example, first, he answered the woman of Chanaan not a word; then he refused her, and finally, he gave her a contemptuous answer, saying: "I was not sent to you, but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel." But, because the woman did not waver in her faith, she found grace, and was consoled with the unexpected commendation: "O, woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou willest." On the other hand, prayer without confidence avails nothing, as we read in the Epistle of St. James: "He that wavers is like a wave of the sea, that is moved and carried about by the wind; therefore, let not that man think, that he shall obtain anything of the Lord." Is not this one of the principal reasons, my brethren, why your prayer is so often unanswered? Do you pray with the right dispositions? Do you pray with humility and attention? Do you pray with confidence? Do you not doubt whether God will or can grant your prayer? We often pray, I admit, but with little faith and confidence, and full of hesitation; though we say we are convinced of the infinite goodness of God, and the truth of the solemn oath of Jesus Christ, that he will give us whatsoever we may ask in his name.

The request of Mary teaches us also, what great confidence we ought to have in her intercession. Confidence in God does not exclude confidence in the Mother of God; and confidence in the intercession of the Mother of God does not lessen our confidence in God; nor is it a dishonor to him. We Catholics acknowledge a great difference between our worship of Christ and our devotion to his Blessed Mother; we adore God as the fountain and only giver of every good gift; but, we only venerate Mary as our intercessor with God. The request which she makes in the Gospel of this day is the clearest proof of her great goodness towards man, and her great power with God.

II. Mary, lovingly mindful of everything that concerns the newly-married couple and their guests, makes their happiness her own, and takes

notice of their need without being informed of it by any one. She does not wait till they have recourse to her intercession, but says to her Son: "They have no wine;" and immediately afterwards, she says to the waiters: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye." But this goodness which she manifests towards the newly-married couple and their wedding guests, would be small comfort to us, if now, on her throne in heaven, she refused to interest herself for us, as she once interested herself for them. From that resplendent throne of glory, she looks down upon us with eyes of mercy; she takes notice of our smallest wants and necessities. To whom, after God, have we to return thanks for so many benefits incessantly bestowed upon us, if not to this Mother of Mercy whom God has appointed to distribute his graces?

And, in effect, why should her love for us not be the same? Has she, perhaps, ceased to be our Mother? No more than she has ceased to be the Mother of Jesus. As long as she is the Mother of Jesus, she is also our Mother, because Jesus became our Brother that he might be the first born among many brethren. He has declared her to be our Mother, and us to be her children, when, hanging on the cross, he published his last will and testament, recommending John to Mary as her son: "Woman, behold thy son," and Mary to John as his mother: "Son, behold thy mother;" so that the Fathers of the Church unanimously believe and teach that all the faithful were then made children of Mary in the person of St. John. Being our Mother, she cannot deny her assistance, when we have recourse to her intercession; and, being the Mother of God, he, our God, will not refuse her request. Therefore, as St. Bernard exclaims: "If the winds of temptation be raised against you, if you run upon the rocks of adversity, invoke the Blessed Virgin; in dangers, in extremities, in doubtful affairs, look up to that Star, invoke the Blessed Virgin, and that you may obtain the assistance of her intercession, be sure to follow her example." The same saint is not afraid to say, in his famous *Memorare*, that no person ever invoked that Mother of Mercy, who was not sensible of the effects of her assistance.

III. The holy Fathers of the Church call the Blessed Virgin our most powerful intercessor with God. She is powerful, not as her Son, whose power is Omnipotence itself, but she is powerful as the Mother of the Omnipotent Son of God, who out of love towards her will grant all her requests, so that she can obtain of God all that she may ask of him. For, who would suppose for a moment, that Jesus would honor his mother less, after having crowned her with an immortal crown of glory, than he honored her whilst upon earth? That he would esteem her prayers less potent now in heaven, than they were at Cana when he performed his first miracle at her request? Solomon, after succeeding to the throne, was not less respectful towards his mother than before; and he considered it the greatest

injustice to refuse her anything. When she entered the royal presence, Solomon arose and went to meet her; he bowed to her before he sat down and a throne was also set for her, the King's mother, and she sat at his right hand, and the King said to her: "Mother, ask, for I must not turn away my face, it is not right to refuse thee anything." Can we suppose less filial love and devotion from him, who says of himself: "A greater one than Solomon is here"? Let us not doubt that Jesus, glorified in heaven, addresses these words unceasingly to his Blessed Mother: "'Mother, ask, for it is not right to refuse thee anything.' Though I have taken possession of my kingdom; though I have been appointed by my Father as Judge of the living and the dead, I shall never forget that thou art my Mother; that I assumed human flesh in thy womb, that I was nursed by thee with the greatest care and tenderness. I will hear all thy prayers; whatever thou shalt ask of me, shall be given to thee, for, 'it is not right to refuse thee anything'." Add to this, that Mary, as the Mother of Jesus, is naturally the most beloved daughter of the Father, and the chosen spouse of the Holy Ghost, and as such the power of her intercession with the Triune God is clearly evident.

Convinced, as we are, of the great goodness of Mary towards us, of the great power of her intercession with God, we should have great confidence in her intercession; and our only care should be to make ourselves worthy of it. She, herself, prescribes how this is to be done, saying to us what she said to the waiters at Cana in Galilee: "Whosoever he shall say to you, do ye." If we desire Mary to intercede for us by her powerful prayers, we must do whatever her Son commands us: "'Whosoever he shall say to you, do ye,'" she cries out to us, as it were, from heaven. "Do ye, whatsoever my Son, (with whom I intercede for you,) commands you by his Gospel, by his Church, by your conscience!" Obedience to her Son, then, my brethren, is the most efficacious means to secure her intercession for us with her Son, and, through him, with our Father in heaven. This is the ladder on which we sinful men can ascend to heaven. Mary prays for us to her Son, and he hears her; the Son prays, in his turn, to his heavenly Father, showing him his open side and bleeding wounds, and the Father hears him, and grants the request. Thus he distributes his graces through Mary, and thus we are happy, dear Christians, here and hereafter, for Jesus changes the waters of tribulation into the wine of holy joy here on earth, and transforms the bitterness of death into the sweetness of life everlasting hereafter. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

## THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS.

*“There is no other Name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.”* *Acts 4: 12.*

The noble and spirited address of the Prince of the Apostles, brought so appropriately before us by the Church on this festival of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, was delivered on an occasion, regarded by both, the friends and enemies of the Christian cause, as the public inauguration of a new system, and the declaration of the Name under which that system was to be established. A challenge is given and accepted; an open, authoritative question is asked, and an open, authoritative answer is returned. Let us in spirit, my dear brethren, behold two of the Apostles, Peter and John, on this eventful day, entering the Temple at one of the hours of public prayer. It is three o'clock in the afternoon; and there is an anxious and excited crowd standing about, some of them prejudiced against, and others well disposed towards the new claimants of spiritual authority. For the day of Pentecost has not long passed by, and already thousands of converts have been gained to the faith. Many, we may imagine, are going in and out of the Temple, gazing with wondering curiosity at the veil, which a few weeks before, on that first Good Friday, was so mysteriously rent in twain, and which is still hanging before these spectators' eyes, as an evidence that former things have passed away, and that all things have been made new.

And now, in their very presence, a wonderful event occurs. A poor crippled man is lying helpless at the gate through which the Apostles are passing. He tries to excite their commiseration; he points to his deformity, and ask for alms. Peter makes answer to his appeal: “Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up, and walk.” Instantly, the poor man leaps up, perfectly healed, and enters into the temple to praise and thank God for the blessing vouchsafed to him. Great excitement follows; and as all the people crowd around the Apostles, Peter avails himself of the opportunity, to preach the Divinity and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the authorities interfere. The two Apostles are apprehended and imprisoned, and the next morning they are brought before the high-priests, and are asked the definite question: “*By what power, or in what name have you done this?*” This is the query that calls forth the sublime answer which Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, gives to his questioners, and which we have read in the Lesson of to-day,

I. You can picture to yourselves what must have been the feelings of St. Peter when he was called upon by the princes and the ancients and the highpriests, who were sitting in judgment, to give an account of his conduct in healing the poor man at the Temple-gate. Could there have been the least element of fear in his heart, when he knew in whose name and power he had performed the miracle? "Our help is in the Name of the Lord," may well have been an expression of his feelings whilst he was passing the night in prison, and preparing to meet his judges. What could they do against God? God, in that miracle, had made him his instrument. He was, therefore, ready and determined to reassert openly in the face of the council, what he had declared to the crowd just before his apprehension,—that it was in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised again from the dead, that the former cripple stood whole before them; that this miracle was intended as a proof of the power and glory of that Name, and that there was no other name in heaven or on earth which could bring salvation to mankind.

The Council before which the two Apostles were arraigned, was the great Council of the Sanhedrim, consisting of the chief-priests, the elders, and the Scribes. Annas and Caiphas are especially mentioned as being of the number; the same high-priest and his father-in-law who had acted so prominent a part not long before in the trial and condemnation of our Lord. Strangely enough, the Name of Jesus Christ is to be thrust before them, to-day, in noble defiance by the same Apostle who, on that previous occasion, had shrunk so timidly from professing his knowledge of that Name. The challenge is now given and accepted. "*By what power, or in what name have you done this?*" is the question which they are called upon to answer, and O, my brethren! most nobly is it answered. Not only does Peter declare by what power and in what name he had wrought the wonderful miracle, but he goes beyond that immediate point, then at issue and, as Head of the Church, announces what the policy of the Church is ever to be: "There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved." And then, dear Christians, the judges propose their cowardly compromise. They had not hesitated at the time of the Passion, to hand our dear Lord over to Pilate, that he might be condemned. But, finding now that his Death has brought victory, (as manifested in the Resurrection;) and that his, once timid, followers are now resolute in his cause, they try another scheme. It is their policy to entice the Apostles into silence; and they try to extract from them a promise to teach no longer in the name of Jesus. But the answer which the successors of St. Peter have so often had occasion since to give, when the world has tried to make them betray the sacred trust reposed in them, was then, for the first time, outspoken: *Non possumus*, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Yes, the noble answer of St. Peter is that to which the Church always

has recourse,—always has ready at hand when she stands arraigned at the bar of the world; or, when she vouchsafes to explain for the encouragement of her children, what are the principles which guide her in her conduct and policy. When asked in what Name and by what power she has contrived to convert nations to the faith, she points to no other name, gives glory to no other name, but that of Jesus. What did she behold before her, when she entered upon the course assigned to her by her holy Founder? She saw mankind wounded and paralyzed, languishing in the deadly chains of sin, yet anxiously craving a helping hand to give comfort in its distress. She looks down upon humanity in its suffering and abjection, and she knows that she has a healing power vested in her, a remedy which she can apply to all believers, in the Precious Blood shed upon Calvary. She has to announce to the nations that Salvation is within their reach; that their God has reigned among them and has brought to them peace and redemption; that Jesus is the Name of him who has purchased them for himself, and whom she has to preach; and that there is no other name given to men whereby they can be saved. "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," she says to them, "arise and walk;" and thus she heals them of the deformity of sin, and brings them, leaping and rejoicing, to her fold.

And in the constant labors which are assigned to her and the struggles she is ever making in her conflict with the world, she has this same glorious Name written on her standard, and under its invocation, she goes fearlessly forward. The great Mystery of Faith which she has to communicate to the world, is all expressed in that one Name. Jesus, my brethren, means a Saviour. It means, therefore, one who can redeem and who has redeemed. It implies the union of two natures in that One Person, who, alone, could and did bring Redemption to his people. To reveal the efficacy of that Name, she points to the place of our Saviour's Nativity, to the scene of his Death; and she shows how the public promulgation of his Name on Calvary, demonstrated the fitness of its being assigned at Bethlehem. For, at the ceremony of the Circumcision, the Name of Jesus was heard only by a few listeners; but, when its glory had been fully earned on Mount Calvary by the humility and obedience of the Divine Victim even unto the death of the Cross, then, that holy Name was displayed in an exalted position by the highest human authority of the time and place,—that none might fail to know under what Name their Saviour was condemned to die; for, it was by Pontius Pilate, the public representative of the world in Jerusalem, that the title was affixed to the head of the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews;" a title, written in three different languages, to the end that all nations and all ages might know the Name of their Redeemer. This holy Name is, therefore, my brethren, the expression of the *Faith* of the Church.

And it is also the expression of her *Hope* and her *Love*. In the midst of all her anxieties and labors, the Eternal Bride of Christ never forgets the command once enjoined upon her: "Ask in my name," nor the promise-

attached to that command, that whatever is so asked, will undoubtedly be granted. Her help is in the Name of the Lord, and it never fails her. It is true, that she has to undergo trials and persecutions in this state of probation, but what results, my brethren, flow from her sufferings? Not her defeat, but her victory. The Cross is ever pressing upon her shoulders; and looking up to it, as it towers above her, she beholds upon its front the Name of Jesus, and bearing it cheerfully, she goes forward full of confidence, yea, and full of love as well. With Christ she is nailed to the Cross. Blessed is she in being fastened firmly there; for the Name of Jesus which she sees upon that sacred Wood, makes her cling to it more fondly; and (with the devotedness of the apostolic one who defied anything to separate him from that love,) she goes on in her career and subdues all nations, all peoples, and all hearts to herself. Thus this holy Name is ever doing its work in the teaching, the struggles, and the conquests of the Church.

II. And now, my dear brethren, let me bring home the efficacy of this Holy Name more closely to your individual souls. You are members and children of the Church, and in marking you as her own, she stamps upon you the sign of the Living God, and applies to you the merits of the Person and Name of Jesus. It is important for you, at all times, to remember your own personal responsibility, and that Almighty God has dealt, and ever is dealing, individually with you. God has created each one of you, dear Christians, and to each one he has given his only-begotten Son as a Redeemer. One by one, you have been brought to the Font of Baptism, and, as in that saving stream original sin was washed away, you were made pure, innocent, spotless, a child of the Church and an heir of the kingdom of Heaven, by virtue of *his* holy Name who instituted that Sacrament and who gave it its efficacy. The strength imparted to you in Confirmation, was infused by that Holy Spirit whom Jesus had a right to send upon his Church; and here, again, the power of the holy Name is manifested in your regard. For, when our dear Lord was promising the Holy Spirit as another Comforter, he spoke of him as the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost "*whom the Father will send in my name.*" It is, then, in the Name of Jesus that the Divine Spirit has been sent upon the Church, and has descended sacramentally upon you.

There are two Sacraments which you are exhorted to receive frequently, in order that you may preserve and increase the grace of God in your souls—*Penance, the Sacrament of Mercy, and the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Love;* and in these two Sacraments, especially, the Name of Jesus has again and again shown its wonderful efficacy in your behalf. When you may have had the misfortune to fall into sin, and lose the grace given through that Name,—what have you done in order to recover it? You have excited yourself to sorrow, you have thought of your evil deeds in the bitterness of your soul; and if you have doubted, like the unhappy Cain,

whether your sin was too great to deserve pardon, you have pondered the meaning of the Name of Jesus; you have reflected upon the power of that Name, and that there is no other name by which you can gain pardon, and be saved. You have thrown yourself on your knees, as Magdalene once did, and have seen above you the Image of the Crucified One. Over his head, you have read the Name which is written there, and you have said to him with confidence: *Be to me a Jesus.* Then, you have felt an assurance of pardon; you have obeyed the command he once gave you: "Go, show yourself to the Priest." There, upon your knees, again at the foot of the Crucifix, you have declared your sins; you have looked upon him whom those sins have pierced; you have called him by his Name, and besought his mercy; and, then, like the poor crippled man in the Lesson of to-day, you have been ordered in the name of Jesus, to arise and walk; and have felt yourself healed, and, once more, restored to the friendship of your God.

And in the Sacrament of Love, his own Sacrament by excellence, in which he gives himself to you to be the food of your soul that you may eat of him and live by him,—what has not this Holy Name done in order to prepare you, to warm you to a fitting degree of love? Penetrated with a lively sense of your unworthiness, you have almost shrunk from approaching so holy a Mystery. Overwhelmed, like St. Peter, by the reality of his Presence, you have been inclined to say: "*Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful creature!*" And you have exclaimed: "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit him?*" But one power has drawn you to your Redeemer, and will not allow you to remain at a distance. It is the power of his Name. Boldly you have said: "*I will take the cup of salvation,*"—for it is the Precious Blood of our Saviour you are invited to receive,—"*and I will call upon the Name of the Lord.*" Then, coming, you drink with joy from the Saviour's fountain, the fountain of him whose Name is Jesus, or Saviour. "*He that thirsts, let him come,*" has been his invitation. "*Come, Lord Jesus,*" has been your answer. At last, united heart to heart, you have held him whom your soul loves; and defying any other power to overcome that which controls you, or to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord, you have gone away, wonderfully comforted and greatly enriched. In your preparation for Holy Communion, in your aspirations before and after the reception of that Adorable Sacrament,—try the efficacy of the Name of Jesus. Repeat it again and again, and, then, say whether it is not a sure receipt for increasing divine love in your souls.

There are two duties to this holy Name, dear brethren, which I urge upon you in the name of the Church; and since their obligations include everything, they are limited to—*Respect and Invocation.* You owe respect to that holy Name. In heaven, on earth, and under the earth, it is no sooner heard, than every creature bows down in adoration. There is no

other name given to you, whereby you must be saved; and as you hope to be saved, take that Name of salvation, dearest Christians, love it, cherish it;—always keep it in your heart, and frequently have it upon your tongue. Let the Name of Jesus be every thing to you. Let every act that you perform, derive its value from being performed in union with his Name. Let every prayer that you offer up before the throne of God, find its force and gain its end, because it is offered up through that blessed Name. Let every trial and suffering which comes to you in this vale of tears, be sweetened, because the Name of Jesus is invoked as the cross descends upon you. Let every temptation be conquered because this Name brings victory. Let every enemy be humbled and every obstacle in the way of your perseverance be surmounted, because the Name of Jesus gives you strength, and assures your success.

My brethren, is it so hard to be saved, when such an easy and efficacious means is placed at our disposal? We are not fighting alone, we are not fighting for ourselves, or for our own cause. We are fighting *under him, with him, and for the cause of him* who bore the name of Jesus. Know, therefore, and love the Holy Name of Jesus. Invoke it constantly in life, in health; in sickness, and in death. He who bore that Name and did for you the work which his Name implies, will be a Jesus, a Saviour to you. He will pardon your past sins; he will secure you against future ones. He will protect you in life, and at the hour of death, will give the crowning Grace which he purchased for you when for your sake, and for my sake, and for the sake of every immortal soul, he took upon himself the Holy Name of Jesus!

SWEENEY. O.S.B.

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### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### THE HELL OF THE CATHOLIC.

*“Many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matt. 8: 11.12.*

Let hell put forth its infernal power, let it launch all its fury, and exhaust all its rage against the Church of God, it can never prevail against her. Scandals cannot destroy her; the cockle is the evidence of the fidelity of her true children; even heresies demonstrate the splendor of her truth, and the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. Let other Neros and other Diocletians arise and persecute her, what can they accomplish? They may

oppress, but they cannot suppress her, for the Eternal Truth has said: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.” Eighteen hundred years ago this promise was made to the Church, the Bride of Christ; yet, it was not made to every one of her children, individually. But if a Christian perseveres in clinging to the impregnable Rock, upon which the Church is built, he will be as invincible, as imperishable, as that Rock itself. In effect, it seems almost impossible that a Catholic should die unhappily and be lost in the bosom of the Church; yet, our Blessed Lord tells us in the Gospel of this day, that the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into exterior darkness. And why? Because they refuse to live according to their vocation. They call themselves Catholics without practising the religion of the Catholic Church; they reject or abuse the grace of God, and thus become objects of divine wrath, and remain such to the end of their lives. And even if they do penance, it is, too often, only an apparent or sham penance,—their sorrow for having offended God being insincere, and, therefore, insufficient to recommend them to the divine mercy. In this state, they depart from life, and enter into that place where everlasting horror dwells, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Had they never known justice and truth, had they been heathens, their future lot were less to be dreaded. But having been Catholics, a terrible hell awaits them, a hell which in rigor surpasses the hell of the Jews, heathens, or heretics for these three reasons:

- I. *On account of the faith which they confessed with their mouths, but denied by their actions;*
- II. *On account of the graces which they received, but abused;*
- III. *On account of the glory, for which they were destined, but of which they rendered themselves unworthy by the immorality of their lives.*

I. The unfortunate soul that goes down into hell shall never return, but shall weep there for ever in despair,—burn there forever in an unquenchable fire. Notwithstanding this general statement, we cannot dispute the fact that the hell of the believer, contrasted with that of the unbeliever, is rendered incomparably severer by the former’s having known the truth and contradicted it by his life. The heathen who lived in the darkness of infidelity, will know that the error in which he had the misfortune to be born, was opposed to salvation; and, although his malice and wilful violation of the natural law, alone condemned him, his unfortunate ignorance of the truth palliates, in a measure, the cause of his damnation; hence, he will not be compelled to reproach himself thus: “I once walked in the way of salvation; but, afterwards, I abandoned it.” But, when a Catholic who was secure in Peter’s bark, that real ark of safety, of which Noah’s was but the figure; when a Catholic whom a merciful Providence had distinguished from idolators by the knowledge of the true God, from Jews

and Turks by *Baptism*, from heretics by *communion with the Church of Christ*.—when the unhappy Catholic shall see himself, at last, in that place of horrors, with what shame and confusion shall he not be covered! Will not these accusing thoughts overwhelm and torment him? “I was on the way to heaven; and now I am in hell through my own fault. I knew the only saving doctrine, and yet I am lost. By *Baptism*, I became a child of God and an heir to his heavenly kingdom, and yet by the abuse of grace I am now, and shall be forever, the enemy of God and the slave of the devil!”

In the Book of Judges, we read of the lamentable misfortune of those seventy-two princes who, being defeated by Adonibesec, had their fingers and toes cut off, and were condemned to gather up the refuse of the meat under the table of the proud conqueror. This humiliation was more painful to them than their mutilation. But the disgrace of a Catholic, weeping in hell, is greater, beyond comparison, than that of these degraded princes. Being conscious of the sign of cross which he bears,—that noble signet of the child of God, imprinted on his forehead,—with what shame and consternation will not the guilty believer be overwhelmed to see himself under the feet of his raging and merciless enemy? How gladly would he blot out that sacred seal in order to escape such intolerable ignominy! But no, he must retain it against his will; it is indelible; it shall never be effaced; he must exhibit it, for his greater shame, before the eyes of all unbelievers, so that even they, (unhappy souls,) may despise him the more for having been so faithless and treacherous to his Crucified Redeemer.

But the punishment of the Catholic in hell does not consist in shame and confusion, alone; his sufferings will be manifold and most excruciating. The arrows of God’s wrath will be specially directed against him. The punishment must be proportioned to the crime; and, thus, it is just that a believer should be punished more severely than an unbeliever; his sins are greater, because, as has been said, he professed the faith with his mouth, but contradicted it by his life. St. Thomas of Aquin says, in other words: “Sin in a believer is not less, but greater than in an unbeliever; for, the believer sins with greater malice, because with greater knowledge.” The sins of Catholics, because they possess the true faith, are greater, more abominable, and of a blacker dye, than the sins of unbelievers; and consequently they deserve greater punishment.

Pitiable, indeed, is the fate of those Catholics who, by their fall into sin or by their relapses after conversion, are ultimately buried in hell. It would have been better for them had they been born Turks or heathens. It is true, their perdition would then have been unavoidable, but they would not have been forced to suffer in hell such exquisite tortures for their perfidy.—O, my dear brethren! we have it yet in our power to escape that shame, confusion and agony; let us profit by the sad experience of others, and honor the faith we profess with the honor it deserves; and, since

it is the only saving faith, let us practice it with such perfection that it may really avail to save us. Let us live according to the dictates of our holy faith, and show forth its purity by the purity of our lives. To live as the multitude live, to do as the generality of believers do, is to desire eternal death; to purchase a deeper hell at the price of a lost Paradise.

II. The punishment of the Catholic in hell will be greater *on account of the many graces which he received, but abused.* In the Gospel of St. Luke we read: That servant who knew the will of his Lord, . . . . and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. "But he that knew it not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." Who does not recognize in these two servants the nominal Catholic and the unbeliever? Who does not see that the former will be more tormented in hell than the latter, because the one knew the will of the Lord, and the other was more or less ignorant of it. The nominal Catholic has been brought up in the true Church of Christ, with the music of her doctrines and precepts always sounding in his ears; he has divinely-authorized teachers who instruct him, and preach to him the Word of Life; he has the good example of the Saints before him, inviting him to the imitation of their virtues; he knows the holy will of God through his commandments and through his ecclesiastical precepts, and his conscience reproaches him whenever he violates them. But the poor heathen who was born and brought up in the darkness of paganism, is destitute of all these means of grace. If, therefore, according to the word of God, he who knows the will of his master and does not do it, shall be punished more severely than he who knows it not, there can be no doubt that the hell of the wicked Christian, the bad Catholic, shall prove a far more tormenting and agonizing one than that of the heathen. The latter, on account of the native darkness in which he lives, is less culpable and will be punished with few stripes; but the former, on account of the many means of grace afforded him, being more culpable, shall be punished with many stripes. Both shall merit everlasting torments, only with this difference, that the Catholic shall suffer more exquisite pains than the unbeliever; for, besides that punishment of his wicked deeds which he shares in common with the heathen, he will also have to pay dearly for the abuse of the graces God had given him during life, in such abundant measure, for his salvation. Our Lord himself says: "To whom much is given, of him, much shall be required; and to whom much is committed, of him, much shall be demanded."

What sort of hell, then, will be the portion of a bad Catholic, if the justice of God shall deal with him according to the measure of graces abused upon earth? Here, mercy treats him as a son:—there, justice shall treat him as an enemy; here, mercy knows no bounds in lavishing its benefits upon him:—there, justice shall know no limits in tormenting him for all eternity. The damned Catholic shall for ever recall to his mind the

many means of salvation which he slighted; the inspirations to which he turned a deaf ear; the Sacraments which he neglected, profaned, and abused; and the admonitions to which he listened heedlessly; and, thus, in the height of his despair he will cry out: “How easily I might have been saved, if I had made good use of only a part of so many graces! Had I heeded those inspirations, had I employed properly those talents, those favors of heaven,—I would not now be where I am. I would not suffer what I suffer. Like many others, I would now enjoy the delights of eternal happiness;—but, because I rejected those gifts of God, I, in turn, am rejected by him.” Those ineffectual graces shall be forever before his eyes; like avenging voices, they shall continue to cry out to him: “Look upon us, ungrateful soul, and acknowledge with pain and bitterness that we were ready, at all times, to aid you in working out your salvation, but you would not co-operate with us.”

Every pain with which the damned in hell are tormented, is calculated to fill us with fear and trembling, but that which strikes the reprobate with most anguish,—the most terrible of all their tortures,—is that each damned soul must say: “I am in this place of horrors, because I willed it so. I would not burn now in hell, if, in life, I had made good use of the grace of God. It is I that have damned myself.”

O, my dear brethren! let us guard against such a misfortune; and as the grace of God is not wanting to us, let our co-operation with that grace, also, not be wanting. Let us follow faithfully and perseveringly the divine inspirations here below, that we may not be under the necessity of saying hereafter: “God has done everything to save my soul, but I have done everything to damn her.”

III. One of the grandest and proudest prerogatives of a Catholic is the ability to say with truth: “*I have a right and title to heaven, and that right and title can never be taken away from me, unless I renounce it myself by the commission of mortal sin.*” And this is the birth-right of every Catholic; a right and title to a seat in the heavenly kingdom, based upon the *true faith*, without which it is impossible to please God. It is based, also, upon *Baptism*, which makes us children of God and heirs of his kingdom, since “unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” It is based upon the *Body and Blood of Jesus Christ*, who, uniting himself most intimately with the person who receives him, gives himself as a pledge of a happy immortality. “He that eateth this bread, shall live for ever.” But as so noble a title elevates a Catholic far above the unbeliever and the heretic, so it, also, makes the pains of hell more terrible and insupportable, if he does not correspond with his privileges and his dignity. The memory of that lost heaven to which he had every right and title, is to him a gnawing worm that shall never die. In utter despair, he will look up to Paradise, and cry out: “O heavenly

country, abode of the Blessed, thou wert mine by right, but I have lost thee, alas, through my own fault." And, thinking of the days of his innocent childhood, he will add: "O, why did I not die immediately after Baptism!"

You have heard, dear Christians, of the pitiable cry of Esau, when he found himself deprived of his birthright, a right which he sold to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage. I shall only remind you that the Sacred Scripture, in order to express the anguish that seized him when he discovered his folly, says, that he roared with a great cry. Judge, my brethren, what will be the cry of the condemned Catholic who, although he was destined for heaven, nevertheless has lost all right and title to it by his own prevarications, and finds himself buried in hell. Together with his loss, he will be tormented by the thought of so many others who once appeared to have no better claim than his own to that Abode of happiness, but who, now, through their fidelity are in possession of it. O, what a terrible sight for him to see so many reigning above in glory, who, in the past, were his equals upon earth; many who sinned not less than he, and perhaps even more, but who did penance for their sins in time. We read, that nothing grieved the prodigal son more than the comparison he made between himself and his father's servants: "How many servants in my father's house have plenty to eat, whilst I here perish with hunger." This is the case of the Catholic who is eternally lost. He will compare himself with others who are happy in the house of their heavenly Father; he will compare his shame with their honor, his captivity with their liberty, his despair with their felicity. Neither can he say with the Prodigal: "*I will arise and go to my father.*" No, no, the time of repentance and mercy is past. He is in hell, others are in heaven; he is miserable, others are happy; he must dwell in a place of horror with the devils, others in a place of felicity with God, with his Blessed Mother, with the Angels and the Saints. Others shall never lose their happiness, he shall never be released from his manifold tortures, and, thus, raging with madness and despair, he shall curse the title which gave him a right to heaven. But it will avail him nothing. He may curse and blaspheme for all eternity; but that title will torment him more than human language can express. Because of it, the devils shall mock him more than they mock the condemned unbelievers; and the Most High himself will be more enraged at him; since, having been a child of God, he behaved not as such, but as the enemy of God.

O, senseless Catholics! What do you do for your immortal souls? Absolutely nothing to save them, but everything to lose them. O, if you would but reflect upon the sort of hell that is awaiting you, I am sure you would not renounce your right and title to heaven for the fleeting pleasures or the perishable goods of this world. Remember: "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God." That loving God in his mercy bestowed upon us an inestimable blessing, placing us among his chosen

friends, and giving us a right and title to heaven which no one can take from us, unless we, senselessly, renounce it ourselves. Let us appreciate that grace, dear Christians, and never make ourselves unworthy of it by a life of sin. Let us not dare to offend so good a God, who has made us not only his children, but the heirs of his eternal kingdom;—let us serve him faithfully all the days of our life, and love him with all our hearts, and so live that we may be able to say in our dying hour: “Lord, at my entrance into the world thou gavest me in Baptism a right and title to heaven,—behold, the time is at hand when I ask and expect to take possession of my inheritance; and that God may then be moved to answer: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Amen.

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### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### THE SAD CONSEQUENCES OF THE SIN OF IMPURITY.

*“Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Matt. 8: 2.*

In the Old Law, the leprosy of the body was attended by very sad consequences for those who were infected with it. They were obliged to dress in a peculiar fashion, to live apart from their kind; and, to all who might approach them, to discover their miserable state by a doleful cry. In fine, they were forced to consider themselves the outcasts, as it were, of the human race. It is for this reason that the leper mentioned in the Gospel of this day asked so humbly and pitifully to be cleansed.—The Fathers of the Church and many spiritual writers regard the leprosy of the body as a figure of the soul which is defiled with sin, and, especially, with the sin of Impurity. As the lepers left no means untried in order to be cleansed from the leprosy of the body, so those who are infected with the leprosy of the soul, should avail themselves of all the means at their disposal, in order to be thoroughly cleansed in spirit and in body. The consequences of this spiritual leprosy are the consequences of Impurity, and they are more fatal, alas! than ever were those of the corporal leprosy in the Old Law. Let us then briefly consider these sad consequences, my brethren, so that if we have been hitherto free from this foul vice, we may prudently guard against it for the future; or if, on the other hand, we are, perhaps, so unhappy as to be infected with it, we may take the necessary steps to be cleansed without any further delay.

*What are the sad consequences of the sin of Impurity? They are,*

- I. Blindness of the understanding;*
- II. Hardness of the heart;*
- III. Temporal and eternal punishments.*

I. Every vehement passion spreads a sort of mist over the understanding, every gross vice darkens it in a measure, but, among all vices, there is none which blinds the understanding more than Impurity. Hence, the psalmist says: "Man, when he was in honor, did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them," (Ps. 48: 21;) and he compares the unclean person to an ignorant horse and a dull mule: "He is become like the horse and the mule which have no understanding." (Ps. 31: 9.) For this very reason, St. Paul does not call the man given to impurity, simply man, but a *beastly* man, and of such a one he says: "The beastly man knoweth not what is of the spirit." His thoughts and imaginations, all his desires and endeavors are bent upon what is carnal, sensual, and beastly; therefore, the holy mysteries and truths of religion which are above sensual and carnal things, by little and little, become incredible to him; the commandments of God, which direct man to curb his passions and to overcome himself, become every day more distasteful and burdensome to him; the threats of God which announce eternal perdition and never-ceasing torments, become to him, the more he hears of them, the more intolerable. This is the reason why so many sensualists have no belief in the mysteries of religion, no reverence for the commandments, for the promises and threats of God. In the most important affair of life, in things regarding heaven and their eternal salvation, they are as ignorant as horses and mules who have no understanding. We have a very striking example of this in Solomon. As you know, Solomon was the wisest of kings, and God himself appeared and conversed with him, as man speaks to man. He had built to this true and living God the most magnificent temple the world ever saw, and, yet, this wise Solomon, this pious monarch, who in his youth was so closely united with his Maker and who had been so singularly favored by him, into what an abyss of folly did he not fall in his later years through sensuality and the excessive love of women! He, who had once conversed with the great Jehovah, degraded himself so far as to erect temples and altars to dumb, lifeless idols; and offered incense before them with the same hands which he had once raised in prayer to the God of his fathers. Sensuality and lust make a fool of a wise man and, there is no vice which obscures and darkens the understanding of man more than that of Impurity. "The beastly man understandeth not what is of the spirit" But, my brethren, what do I say? "What is of the spirit?" A lewd person is also blind to what concerns his body and his temporal welfare; he acts like a fool, without reflection, without prudence, or judgment. There is no advantage which he does not despise; no duty which he does not neglect; no infamy to which he does not degrade him-

self, in order to gratify his beastly passions. A profligate father and husband forgets what he owes to his wife and children; he squanders his means, and ruins his family in order to gratify the vanity of some infamous woman who has gained those affections which, alone, belong to his lawful wife. To gratify his passions, he is even cruel to his family. An immodest wife forgets what she owes to her husband, and thinks no more of that holy, inviolable fidelity which she pledged to him at the altar, before God and all his Saints. A lewd young girl forgets what she owes to herself, and is not ashamed, for the sake of this vice, to bereave herself of her brightest ornament and to cover herself with infamy and disgrace. A licentious young man forgets all the interests of his future career: and does not consider that by his sinful courses he renders himself incapable of earning an honorable living, besides depriving himself of the esteem of his fellow-men, of the blessing of God, and of all happiness, here and hereafter. In short,—dissolute persons are despised and avoided; their friends are ashamed of them: “He that is an adulterer gathereth to himself shame and dishonor, and his reproach shall not be blotted out.” (Prov. 6: 32. 33.) The victim of lust adorns the idol he adores, he neglects the duties of his state of life; he is intent only upon satisfying his base, beastly passions, to gratify which he spares no sacrifice. “He that maintaineth harlots, shall squander his substance.” (Prov. 29: 3.) Remember the prodigal son. Not only he, but thousands of others have been reduced to poverty, nay, even beggary, in consequence of their immorality. Thus Impurity blinds the understanding of the sinner with regard to his temporal and eternal welfare, but

II. It also *hardens the heart*. No vice is so quickly learned, or is so likely to become habitual as that of Impurity, and no vice is harder to abandon or more rarely reformed; for this abominable passion most eagerly takes hold of the imagination; the occasions are many, and always at hand, and the inclination to it is the most vehement in man. If, therefore, one does not resist the sin of Impurity in the very beginning, in less than no time it becomes a habit, and the habit, a necessity, and, finally, a second nature, and thus ends by hardening the heart of man in evil more than any other sin. Holy Scripture confirms this by word and example: “They will not set their hearts to return to their God: for the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them.” (Osee 5, 4.) “A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it;” (Prov. 22: 6) and St. Paul says of the lewd, that, “despairing, they give themselves up to lasciviousness.” (Ephes. 4: 19.)

The experience of all times tells us the same truth. How many are there, who being once delivered up to this vice, continue, alas! my brethren, to add sin to sin! Evil thoughts, filthy imaginations, detestable desires, shameful ideas, criminal gratifications, and deeds of darkness, succeed each other, almost without interruption, during a long series of years. They

hardly ever seriously think of amendment, so that their sins become more numerous than the hairs of their head; or, as Osee says: "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God, for the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them." And, although such a one, through the agency of a powerful sermon, or of some personal calamity, may be roused from his deadly sleep of sin, and be converted,—is his conversion of any duration? Ah! beholding his abundant tears, hearing his groans and lamentations, his words and promises, you might almost be tempted to believe that a second Prodigal Son or penitent Augustine was returning to the Father in heaven. You persuade yourselves, dear Christians, that he, the poor sinner, is really in earnest in his apparent conversion; but wait a little while, and you will change your opinion. For a few days have hardly elapsed since his confession,—the old inclination from within, and the old occasion from without have scarcely presented themselves again, when all his good resolutions melt away as the newly-fallen snow before the warm sun of the spring-tide; and he is the same sinner as before, disgracefully relapsing into his former vile iniquities. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he walketh through places without water, seeking rest: and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house, whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first." (Luke 11: 24-27.) No vice so blinds the understanding and hardens the heart as impurity, and, therefore, we need not wonder that this sin draws upon its victims the most terrible vengeance of God.

III. The time is too short,—and I will not detain you long enough to enumerate all the punishments of lust which are recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. Without mentioning Sichem, who, on account of impurity, was killed by Jacob's sons; nor Her and Onan, whom the earth devoured alive; nor Heli's sons, who perished in the war, nor the tribe of Benjamin, which was almost entirely destroyed by the sword; nor the twenty-four thousand of the Israelites who, on one occasion, were put to death by God's decree for crimes which they had committed against the Sixth Commandment;—I beg of you, dear Christians, only to call to mind the two memorable punishments of God on the whole human race,—first,—at the time of the Deluge, when all were drowned, with the exception of eight persons, because "all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth;" (Gen. 6: 12); and secondly,—at the epoch when Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring cities were destroyed by a rain of brimstone and fire, because they had given themselves up to their unbridled passions and abominable sins of the flesh. It is true, God in our days does not punish this vice so strikingly and awfully as in former days, when he vented his wrath on the guilty children of Israel, yet, this vice in modern times is just as certainly fol-

lowed by severe chastisements. War, famine, pestilence, bankruptcy, revolutions, are the punishments of impurity on individuals as well as on families and nations. And even though this vice be not followed, (in exceptional cases,) by beggary, contempt, shameful and painful diseases; even though it appear to go unpunished in this world,—which, however, is hardly ever the case,—it is, assuredly, followed in the other world by the eternal torments of which the Sacred Scripture speaks, when it says: “The whoremongers shall have their portion in the pool with fire and brimstone.” (Apoc. 21: 8.) O, how shall a body used only to luxury and sensual pleasures, ease, and comfort, and good cheer, how shall that delicate flesh burn in that insatiable fire, which kindled by the power of God, and fed by the fuel of his justice can never be extinguished! The delight lasts but a moment, but the pain will last for ever.

We have now considered the terrible effects of this moral leprosy, the lamentable consequences of the sin of Impurity, and we see that they are that blindness of the understanding which obscures the light of Faith; that hardness of the heart, or will, which constitutes obstinacy in sin; and all those other temporal and eternal punishments with which God visits this infamous vice. From these considerations we must necessarily draw a twofold conclusion,—one, for the benefit of the innocent, and another, for the encouragement of the fallen. You, my dear brethren, who hitherto have preserved your body and its five senses, either in holy virginity or in admirable continency; you, who have restrained your happy souls from evil desires and deeds,—esteem and value nothing more highly than this heavenly treasure of purity. Shun all bad company and all incentives to sin; detest and avoid all immodest words and conversations, all dangerous glances and touches; stifle evil inclinations and immodest thoughts in their very birth; and in every temptation and danger, never forget that the all-seeing eye of God is upon you.

But you, my poor children, who have been so unfortunate as to defile your soul and your body with the filthiness of this vice, O, I implore of you, repent, whilst there is time, of this great sin which is attended by such dreadful consequences. Endeavor, by all possible means, to free yourself from it; and carefully avoid everything that has, hitherto, been to you an occasion of impurity. Humbly cry out to Jesus (with the leper of the Gospel), to make you clean; and if your cry for relief is really sincere as *his* was, Jesus will be filled with compassion for your miseries; he will support your weakness with his grace; and will say to you, as he said to that rejoicing leper,—“I will, be thou made clean.” Amen.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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THE INNOCENT SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY AND THE GUILTY ARE SPARED FOR THE SAKE OF THE INNOCENT.

*“Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with waves.” Matt. 8: 24.*

Whilst Jesus was asleep in the ship, the Apostles were in danger of being overwhelmed by the tempest that arose in the sea. They awoke him, saying: “Lord, save us, we perish.” He rebuked them for their want of faith, saying: “Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?” then, rising up, he commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm. We justly attribute the wonderful deliverance of the Apostles from this danger to the gracious interposition of the God-Man; but the question arises: Why did our divine Lord permit the tempest to become so violent on this occasion? He had been in the ship with his Apostles often before, and no storm had arisen. Thus, we read in St. Luke’s Gospel, that when a great multitude was gathered together by the Lake of Genesareth to hear the word of God, our Lord saw two ships, and going into one of them, that was Simon’s, he desired him to push out a little from the land; and, sitting down, he taught the multitude out of the ship. No mention is made of a tempest at this time. Quite a different scene is presented to our view in this day’s Gospel! “A great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with waves.” What is the reason of this difference? But, before answering this question, I will ask another: What is meant by the ship of Peter? By it we understand the Catholic Church which embraces in its blessed ark, many nations and empires, tribes and tongues. What storms of tribulation are gathering in our days over this devoted Ship? What violent tempests are threatening! Why all this stormy agitation? Has the whole world become disloyal to its Maker and Redeemer? We cannot say this: for, in the midst of a corrupt generation, there are many faithful children of God, who, indeed, live in the world, but not with the world. But, why does divine Justice visit whole communities, cities, and nations with afflictions, if all do not deserve them? Is it just that the innocent should suffer with the guilty? Why is it so? The reason is this: *all of us constitute but one body, one family, and as the whole body suffers, when one member is sick, so whole cities, nations and countries are sometimes punished, because of the crime of one man; as, on the other hand, whole cities, nations and countries are spared from calamity, and saved from destruction, for the sake of one just man.*

I. The voyage of St. Paul recorded in the "Acts," my brethren, was prosperous as far as the island of Crete; but, when they left the harbor, neither sun, nor stars appearing for many days, and no small storm threatening, all hopes of safety were well nigh lost. Two hundred and seventy-six persons were in the ship with the Apostle, and they were all, naturally, in great fear when the tempest arose; yet, none perished, but all landed safely. Nothing else saved them, dear Christians, but the presence of St. Paul, to whom an angel appeared, saying: "Behold, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." What do these words intimate? Their obvious meaning is this: All those that were in the ship would have perished, had not St. Paul been among them; God saved them all for his sake. Referring to this, St. Chrysostom says: "Many sailed in the vessel with St. Paul, but among them there were none that knew and feared God but he, and God is of such goodness and mercy as to avert a calamity for the sake of one just man." But is not this praise given to St. Paul, a reproach to St. Peter? As St. Paul was in the ship that sailed to Rome, so St. Peter was in the ship mentioned in this day's Gospel. Was St. Peter less acceptable to God than his fellow-Apostle? His ship is covered with waves and in danger of sinking, and we do not read that the ship in which St. Paul sailed, was in the same dangerous condition; we only read that no small storm was threatening. Why this difference? In the ship that was bound for Rome there was no just man save St. Paul, the rest were heathens; on the other hand, all that were in St. Peter's ship were saints, with the exception of Judas, who, at that time, had probably resolved in his mind to betray his Lord and Master. Now, as God in the ship of St. Paul, spared all for the sake of that just man, so, on account of the one sinner, Judas, he gave the ship of St. Peter up to the fury of the waves, so that it was covered with them, and in danger of sinking.

When the Most High revealed to Abraham that he had decreed to destroy Sodom by fire, Abraham said to him: "Wilt thou destroy the just with the wicked; if there be fifty just men in the city, shall the just perish withal, and wilt thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just?" And the Lord said to him: "If I find fifty just in Sodom, I will spare the whole city for their sake." And Abraham answered and said: "Seeing I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord: what, if there be five less than fifty just persons, wilt thou for the sake of forty-five destroy the whole place?" And he said: "I will not destroy it, if I find forty-five." And, again, Abraham said: "But, if forty be found, what wilt thou do?" And the Lord said: "I will not destroy it for the sake of forty." "Lord, be not angry if I speak. What, if thirty shall be found there?" And the Lord said: "I will not destroy it, if I find thirty there." "Seeing," said Abraham, "I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord: what if twenty be found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." "I beseech thee," said Abraham, "be not angry, O Lord, if I

speak once more. What if ten shall be found there?" He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." He had no sooner said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten," than, the Scripture says, "*the Lord departed.*" I find the *reason of his departure* mentioned in the subsequent chapter, where I can count only *four just persons* in the whole city of Sodom, namely: Lot and his wife and their two daughters. If ten just persons had been in the city of Sodom, God, according to his promise made to Abraham, would not have destroyed it for their sake; but, finding only four, he rained fire and brimstone upon it, and destroyed the city and the whole country around about with all its inhabitants. He saved in this instance the four just persons, but all of the unjust perished.

The Lord said: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten just," because he loves the just, and it is his pleasure to be with them; they are most powerful with him, they obtain all that they may ask of him, for "the prayer of the just man availeth much;"—it is in a manner, omnipotent. I prove this by referring you to the 32nd chapter of the Book of Exodus where we read, that, when Moses had prayed to God for the sins of his people, God said to him: "*Let me alone* that my wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them." Mark the words: "*Let me alone;*" a strange expression,—God being not only powerful, but Omnipotence itself, how does it come, that he says: "*Let me alone?*" Is Moses stronger than God? No, but the intercession of the just man is of such virtue that it prevails upon the Almighty; the justice of God may decree punishments, but the prayer of the just man constrains him, as it were, to withhold them.

The just, my brethren, behold the oppression of justice, the seduction of innocence, the torture of scandals, the weakness of faith, contempt for everything that conduces to God's honor and glory; they behold the corruption and bad morals of so many Christians, and, in secret, they weep and bewail these evils, and pray to God to avert, in his mercy, the storms of tribulation that are gathering over the heads of those unhappy Christians. As long as God finds a sufficient number of just persons who thus pray to him, he withholds his vengeance and is appeased. But the moment he fails to find a sufficient number of faithful souls, he visits all with afflictions and calamities, such as war, famines, pestilences and earthquakes, and, thus, compels them by grievous crosses to return to him. Yes, "the prayer of the just man availeth much" with God, for he frequently spares the unjust for his sake.

II. "Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with waves." Jesus was in the ship with the Apostles; Jesus is holiness itself; eleven of the Apostles were united to him by divine grace. But Judas was, also, there, the wicked Judas, who was already planning his dreadful treason; and on *his* account the ship was exposed to the greatest danger. Something like this occurred in the Old Law. We read that God

ordered Jonas to go to the city of Nineveh, there to preach penance. But he would not obey, but rising up to flee into Tharsis from the face of the Lord, he went down to Joppe, and found a ship going to Tharsis; he embarked in it and thought to reach his self-willed destination. But God had decreed otherwise; frustrating his plans, he sent a violent wind; a great tempest arose, and the ship was in danger of being wrecked. The mariners were in great fear, and said: "Come, let us cast lots, that we may see why this evil is upon us." They cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonas, God so ordaining it; for, Jonas was the cause of the tempest,—since it was on his account that the ship was in danger of foundering. He could not conceal his guilt, and said: "Take me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you, for I know, that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." And they took Jonas, and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging. Jonas sinned, and the innocent were threatened with the punishment due to him, alone; the sin of the one was the danger of all, for this is the way with the inscrutable judgments of the Lord, the just are frequently punished with the unjust. Is it not an every day occurrence, my brethren, that the good have to suffer with the wicked? By the carelessness or malice of one person a house takes fire; and not only a single house is consumed, but also some of the neighboring houses, and at times, whole cities are burned to a heap of ashes, and the inhabitants rendered homeless. The enemy, besieging a city, finds the guards asleep, scales the walls, takes possession of the city, and puts all to the sword. Whose fault is this? That of the sleeping guards; and, yet, all have to suffer for their negligence. A father squanders his goods by gambling and living riotously; and thus reduces his wife and children to poverty. The crime or neglect of one sinner draws dreadful consequences after it upon all the just. Adam was commanded by God not to eat of a certain fruit in the Garden of Eden; he ate of it; and thus, by his transgression of the divine precept, he not only lost original justice and sanctifying grace for himself, but also, for, all his posterity; so that it remains true, that the innocent are frequently punished with the guilty.

But the Bible furnishes another striking illustration of this truth. In the seventh chapter of the Book of Josue we read that, after taking the city of Jericho, he sent three thousand men to lay siege to the city of Hāi; but they had no sooner pitched their tents, than the inhabitants made a sally upon them, and the army of Josue was defeated and put to flight. Seeing himself thus vanquished, he had recourse to God, and was greatly surprised to hear these words, coming from the mouth of the Most High: "*I will be no more with you.*" Why, my brethren, would he be no more with him? God himself furnishes the reason: "*Israel hath sinned.*" What sin, (you ask), did Israel commit? One soldier, named Achan, committed the sin of theft. Before taking the city of Jericho, God ordered that all the spoils should be offered to him, and that no one should appropriate anything to

himself. Contrary to the orders of God, Achan had retained a scarlet garment, and some gold and silver, and, therefore, you see, dear Christians, on *his* account, the whole army was punished. In the 34th Chapter of Genesis, we read that all the men of the city of Sichem were slain by Jacob's sons for the sin of Hennor, who had ravished Dinah, Jacob's daughter. In the book of Numbers, we find that the princes were hanged, and twenty-four thousand men killed by the divine mandate, because one man had committed a sin against the Sixth Commandment. And the prophet Isaias relates, that once the flood-gates of the heavens were closed, so that no rain fell upon the earth for three years; and that there was a great famine; and whose fault was it? That of Ozias, the king, who had turned his back upon the true God, and bent his knee to idols.

In conclusion, my brethren, let us consider our own sins, and afflictions, with which God has visited us from time to time. The punishments, in our case, are certainly less than the offence. When God punishes us, we weep and bewail our sins; but as soon as he withholds the rod, we commit the same sins again. When he strikes, we beseech him to be merciful to us, and the moment he shows mercy, we sin, presuming on his mercy. In the ship of St. Peter we can be saved, but if storms must come, let not *our* sins, dear Christians, be the cause of their coming. Let us strive to be just, for if there be no sinner, the just will escape the punishment of sin. Beloved brethren, you must be either just or unjust; if you are just, seek, by every means in your power to continue in that state, that God, for your sake, may spare the unjust. If you are unjust, do not remain in that condition, but return to your duty, to your God, that he may not, on your account, punish the good. But, if the just sustain and share the chastisement of your sins, it will only be *in this world*; they will suffer, undeservedly for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls, and their eternal reward will be exceeding great; whilst you, my brethren, if unfaithful, will have to suffer, without any benefit to your souls, either here or hereafter, —a misfortune which I beg God in his mercy to avert from you all. Amen.

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#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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##### THE SIN OF INJUSTICE.

*“Thou shalt not steal.” Exod. 20: 15.—Rom. 13: 9.*

You are, doubtless, prepared, dear Christians, by the words of my text for the subject on which I propose to address you on the present occasion, that is, the base and iniquitous crime of injustice. This is a crime which the Almighty proclaims to be highly repugnant to his sovereign and ador-

able will, and one against which he has left upon record a most strict and positive command. It is a crime that in civilized countries has ever been branded with the mark of infamy, and which has constantly entailed on its unhappy perpetrators the most severe and rigorous punishment. A crime, (with the enormity of which, the law of nature, independent of revelation, makes us sufficiently acquainted,)—injustice has ever been regarded with the utmost disdain by enlightened and virtuous minds,—nay, more, the very pagans themselves have been taught to view it with detestation and horror. It has, unhappily, proved the origin of innumerable evils in society, the source whence the ruin of kingdoms and empires have flowed; and it is, in short, a crime that has not only deluged the earth with human blood, but has drawn down upon its victims on several occasions, (as we find recorded in Holy Writ), the visible and most rigorous chastisements of Heaven.

If we reflect, my dear brethren, on the crying malice of this vice, the many painful hours, the many heart-rending sighs, the many bitter imprecations, which the crime of injustice produces; if we view the tears of the widow, listen to the cries of the orphan, the lamentations of the myriads who weep for private or public wrongs,—if I say, we consider all this accumulation of woe on the one hand, and, on the other, behold the accursed hand of the spoiler, stained with the blood of innumerable inoffensive and amiable creatures, and wresting from the broken-hearted survivors the dearly-earned fruits of their honest labor and industry,—when we reflect upon all these examples of an impious and hellish oppression, with which the history of almost every nation abounds, can it be a matter of surprise to us that the Almighty has sometimes interposed his Divine power, even in this life, in favor of suffering innocence, by hurling destruction on the guilty heads of its vile oppressors?

The unjust man would do well to consider, for a moment, how short-lived must be the enjoyment of those ill-gotten possessions for which he sacrifices his soul, his happiness, his God, his all; he should reflect, in time, upon the dread, the apprehension, with which the consciousness of guilt will inevitably assail him at the awful hour of dissolution. He should foresee, with fright, the terrors of that dread tribunal before which he must soon appear, and the rigor of that punishment which he has only too much reason to dread as the certain consequence of his present injustice.

If he ponder seriously, my dear Christians, upon all these fear-inspiring considerations, and can still proceed to act unjustly or to retain what he has already iniquitously acquired, then, his conscience must be, indeed, seared against the warning dictates of religion, and his heart steeled against every virtuous impression; in him, the menaces of heaven are deprived of their salutary influence, and his reprobation is, at last, the dreadful issue of his own fatal indifference.

I beg your attention to-day, my dear brethren, first, while I point out to you *the nature of justice*, and *the dangers attending its violation*; secondly, while I exhibit to your view *some of the various ways, in which I conceive this solemn precept to be violated*; and, finally, while I endeavor to prove to you, on the unerring authority of Scripture, *the imperative obligation of making condign satisfaction for injustice done, before it be too late*;—an obligation, (I will add,) from which nothing but the forgiveness of the injured person or the utter impossibility of making restitution to him, can ever absolve you.

I. Justice is defined as a moral virtue, inclining the will to render to every one what justly belongs to him. The love of justice, no less than that of truth, was stamped upon the human soul by the Creator in the first moment of its existence. The observance of it seems to be the great bond which preserves inviolate the common rights of civilized men, and,—as the cement of social order and harmony,—even the law of nature proclaims the necessity of justice to all. There are certain words, my dear Christians, which deserve to be written upon the heart in letters of gold; certain precious words which comprise the whole duty of man in a moral point of view, and the faithful practice of which would soon put an end to all the disorders and vices that prevail in society. These words are the Shibboleth of justice, and they are: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The law of nature, I repeat, independent of the lights of revelation, dictates the observance of this excellent virtue; nor is the malice of its violation unknown or unfelt, even amidst the thickest shades of infidelity. Reason, alone, tells us that the goods of this life which are the fruits of an honest industry, or which divine Providence has vested, without toil, in the hands of his creatures, should be held by a sacred and inviolable right,—otherwise, the order and regularity of society could never be maintained. Reason anathematizes as execrable and impious the audacious robber and spoiler, whose bold hand would dare to wrest the property of others from the stronghold where Justice had deposited it.

Religion tells us that even a wilful thought or deliberate desire against our neighbor’s rights, partakes of the malignity of this vice of injustice, and, no sooner are we tempted to consent to the promptings of the enemy, than the mouth-piece of right reason, Conscience, that internal monitor of the human mind,—implanted there by the Almighty to regulate its operations,—Conscience, I say, warns us of the approach of evil, and shrinks at the very suggestion of crime. If the object of its detestation be injustice, and, if the will has already perpetrated the evil, the inward censor proclaims even to the unwilling mind, that condign restitution must be made. My dear brethren, I appeal to you, individually, if ever you were guilty of an injustice, either in stealing from your neighbor, or defrauding him of his rightful property by forming unjust contracts, or not paying your lawful

lebts,—I ask you, if you ever wilfully committed these sins without feeling the remorse and stings of conscience, I have just described to you? If conscience, then, can create such uneasiness in the human breast amidst scenes of pleasure and dissipation, when a thousand objects conspire to hush its murmurings, and stifle its salutary influence, what must be the agitation of the guilty soul at the still and solemn moment of death? Before the dying sinner rises a double vision of distress. Beyond the grave, he beholds a world upon whose unknown boundaries he is about to enter, where justice will be executed with the greatest rigor, yea, (to use the Scripture expression) even to the very last farthing;—and, at the same time, all around his dying bed, like so many avenging spirits, appear the many injustices he has been guilty of, the many injuries of which he has been the unhappy cause, the miserable masses of ill-gotten goods which he deferred restoring to their owners whilst it was in his power, and which now, alas! he has neither the time, nor the means, nor the inclination to restore. My dear brethren, is not the very thought of this unhappy state of things enough to shorten the few remaining moments of the sinner's life, and cause him to sink under the pressure of affliction into an untimely grave?

Having shown that the crime of injustice is repugnant to the very law of nature itself, let us, now, see what revealed religion has to say upon the subject. The words of my text contain a most solemn command which, methinks, if seriously considered, should amply suffice to convince the most incredulous,—but, who is it, dear friends, that utters those solemn words: “Thou shalt not steal”? The Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. To whom does he address himself on this important question, when he, thus, proclaims his sovereign will? To all mankind. Tell me, again, my brethren, what is here prohibited? Injustice of every kind, sort, and degree. Here, let the public robber, the concealed thief, the unjust usurer, the vile extortioner, the dishonest merchant, the fraudulent embezzler, the iniquitous servant,—here let them all read and all find their condemnation, written in the most legible characters: “Thou shalt not steal.” Besides this command, and the warnings of the 22nd chapter of Exodus, wherein the Almighty decrees the most rigorous punishments against the transgressors of this divine injunction, I shall quote two or three other passages of Scripture which present to the world a lasting monument of the stern severity with which the Almighty, even in this life, punishes the sin of injustice.—We read in the Book of Joshua (Chap. 7) that the Israelites, the chosen people of God, having marched against the inhabitants of Har, suffered a defeat; Joshua, their leader, wept before the Lord for this misfortune of his people. The Almighty, himself, declared to him that Israel's sin was the cause; a person, named Achan, had concealed in his tent some property he had unjustly acquired,—and what was the consequence? God singled him out as the object of his vengeance. Achan and all his family were stoned to death,

and their remains, together with the property of the dishonest Achan, consumed by fire. The second Book of Maccabees (Chap. 3 and 9) furnishes us with two other instances of the divine vengeance in the persons of king Antiochus and his minister Heliodorus.—This iniquitous minister having been sent by his still more impious master, to rifle the sacred treasures of the Temple of Jerusalem, the high-priest Onias and his people were overwhelmed with affliction, and besought the Most High, to avert the awful sacrilege,—when, behold, two Angels are deputed from Heaven to avenge the insult offered to justice and religion. They surround Heliodorus, they scourge him almost to death, they tell him to render thanks to Onias for even the boon of life itself, and they command him to return and proclaim to Antiochus the wondrous works and power of the God of Israel.—The guilty king was afterwards, by the judgment of heaven, devoured by worms, and expired in the midst of the most excruciating tortures,—serving to all succeeding ages as a striking example of the instability of human greatness, and a convincing proof of the malignity of the double sin of covetousness and injustice.

Thus, dear Christians, has the Almighty shown his detestation of this vice by avenging it in the most awful manner, even in this life, and by inflicting on its unhappy perpetrators the most severe and lasting chastisements. I shall only add to the testimony of the Old Law in this regard, a word or two from the writings of the great St. Paul in his Epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians. In his Epistle to the latter, he cautions them against overreaching, deceiving, or circumventing their neighbor, because the Lord is a revenger of all those evil things;—and, writing to the Corinthians, he ranks injustice in that black catalogue of crimes which exclude the sinner eternally from the kingdom of heaven. “Neither thief,” says he, “nor the covetous, nor extortioners, shall ever possess the kingdom of God.” Is not this sufficient to convince you of the enormity of this crime, and to impress you with awe of its dangerous consequences? Is it not enough to induce you to abhor and detest the smallest sin of injustice?

II. I shall not detain you longer to prove a truth which is evident enough already, but shall proceed to point out *the various ways in which it is committed*. In doing this, I shall confine myself, dear brethren, principally to those states and occupations of life with which we, ourselves, are conversant. In the course of my remarks, I will draw your attention to some instances of injustice so evident and glaring, that they cannot escape the notice of the most superficial observer; and I shall unearth and lay bare others of so latent and insidious a nature, that you, yourselves, have never been led to discover them, and which you would scarcely have the courage to pursue through all the manifold windings and twistings of self-love.—In drawing for you, these pictures of human life and moral depravity, whilst I have no intention of being at all personal

in my delineations, possibly, some of you may see your own likeness in the graphic sketch;—if it be so, God grant that the faithfulness of the picture may induce you to an abhorrence of the contemptible vice. This, it cannot fail to do, if you view it through the medium of religion, with full advertence to its baseness in the sight of God and to the dreadful eternity, into whose torments its perpetration unrepented of, will infallibly precipitate you. To commence, then, I will suppose a company of merchants or traders, who do not scruple to monopolize scarce articles of commerce in order to raise their value. The principle of such men is, that goods are worth whatever they may bring; and they take advantage of the necessity of the purchaser by raising the price of an article, (in which they already have an ample profit,) considerably higher than the law of justice allows. They wish to buy cheap and to sell dear, and they do not hesitate to palm off on their customers as good and perfect articles, a bad or damaged line of goods which they are well aware are not worth the money paid for them. Such merchants are dishonest. St. Paul assures us that Heaven is not for them; and Solomon, in his Book of Proverbs, declares to them “that it is better to have little with the fear of God than to possess great and insatiable treasures.” Here, again, is a man who employs servants; he is, himself, designated by the name of Planter; he agrees with his workmen for a certain stipulated sum, which he promises to pay when the time specified in their agreement, has expired; in the mean time, he furnishes the poor fellows with liquor and other unnecessary things, in order that they may consume their wages in advance. If some of them, however, have sense enough to see through this chicanery, and possess prudence enough to avoid the snare, the baffled employer does not hesitate to brand them as bad servants, and refuse them the testimonials which would secure them work elsewhere. However specious such a man’s conduct may appear to the world, I make bold to say, as the minister of Christ, that he is, at heart, dishonest. Again, my brethren, we sometimes meet with a servant who receives a certain salary; he is intrusted with the care or management of property, and is bound to fulfil his duty and do every thing in his power to advance his master’s interests. In the mean time, he neglects his work; his master’s welfare is to him a matter of very little importance; perhaps, he squanders his master’s substance, takes the unwarranted liberty of giving it away, or suffers it to be damaged or injured. Should he scruple, however, to make away with the property himself, he may so far forget his duty as to allow his fellow servants or others to do so, without warning the latter of their injustice, or putting his master on his guard against the dishonest parties. A servant who thus sins in any of the circumstances I have described, is guilty of a flagrant breach of trust, is responsible for every such injustice to his master; and although he may imagine himself walking in the path of innocence, I have to announce to him the melancholy tidings, that the road he travels is the broad one which leads to perdition.

Here is a man, again, dear Christians, who will take up property to any amount he may be credited, without giving himself the least trouble how he is to pay for it, or without endeavoring by industry and economy, to put himself in a condition of making payment.—He, perhaps, finds money enough for selfish purposes at home, whilst outside, he contracts debts, rolls on in a round of dissipation, and, doubtless, would have the world believe him honest. Let him make as many palliations as he pleases, however,—let him assume as many cloaks as he can, to screen his dishonest dispositions,—in the name of religion and of justice, I do not hesitate to tell him, that he has no more title to the epithets *honest* and *just* than has the common high-way robber who presents a dagger to your breast to extort your purse or your watch. It is no matter where or how you contract a lawful debt, my dear brethren, if you possess the means of discharging it, your salvation is at stake until justice has its due.—Here, in fine, are men to whom property is advanced on the faith and expectation of meeting returns, and such returns, too, as the property delivered gives them hope of acquiring; so far, however, are those just expectations from being realized, that, with the utmost privacy and under the cover of night, (circumstances, alone, sufficient to imply guilt,) the goods are conveyed surreptitiously into other and dishonest channels. Persons who, in these cases, give away such property, as well as those who receive it, are alike criminal, and if they escape the censure or punishment inflicted by human tribunals here below, they will find that God himself will be the avenger of their guilt in another world.—Each of the characters I have here enumerated is dishonest, each is guilty of a flagrant breach of justice. And what shall I say of those parents who squander in liquor or other vices, the money which they should devote to the decent maintenance of their families? What of those wives who waste or give away the substance of their husbands, regardless of the fact that it is the husband, and not the wife, who possesses the dominion of property? What of those unjust children, who steal from their parents, or allow the goods with which they are intrusted to be lost or injured through their fault or negligence?—My dear Christians, these are some of the thousand ways of committing injustice; and, although the brief limits of my discourse will not admit of a particular mention of them all,—an impartial examination of your consciences will soon acquaint you whether or not you are guilty of any of them. I have endeavored to show you the malice of this crime and a few of the ways in which it is perpetrated, it remains to show the obligation and mode of making restitution, an obligation from which no power on earth or in heaven can dispense, so long as the wronged party demands his rights and the guilty one has means to repair the wrong.

III. Restitution is an act of commutative justice by which property unjustly taken away is restored, or the damage done is amply compensated for; the law of nature which condemns injustice, commands at the same

time, that condign satisfaction must be made to violated justice.—As there are various ways of committing injustice, so are there various sources whence arises the obligation to make amends to the injured. In the first place, the possessor of unjust property is bound to restitution; secondly, not only the person who commits the injustice must make reparation to the wronged party or parties, but, also, those who command it, those who counsel it or wink at it, as well as those who were receivers or participators in the injustice. Finally, *they* are bound to restitution who did not prevent or make known the injustice when, by virtue of some certain compact or agreement, they were obliged in conscience so to do. The next question is,—to whom must restitution be made? Restitution must be made, my dear friends, to the rightful owner, if he be in existence; if not, to his lawful heir or successor. When this cannot be done, or it so happens that the owner of the property is unknown, the full amount of the ill-gotten treasure must be given to the poor or devoted to some pious purpose for the benefit and advantage of the rightful owner. Further, in making the restitution, dear brethren, you must know that the original goods of which you have defrauded your neighbor must be restored to him, if possible,—if not, an equivalent in value. Nor is this enough; every loss that may have been sustained in consequence of your dishonesty, and every damage that followed thereupon, must also be fully compensated before the sin is forgiven you.

This is the law of restitution; its obligation is founded, (as we have seen,) on the law of nature itself, and established by conclusive proofs from the pages of both the Old and the New Testaments. Thus declares the Almighty in Exodus (Chap. 22.) “If any thing be taken away by stealth, the damages shall be restored to the owner;” and by the voice of the prophet Ezechiel, he says (Chap. 33) “If the wicked will turn from his sin, and return again what he has robbed, he shall not die.”—You see, then, my dear brethren, that restitution is a necessary condition in order to be restored to the favor of the Almighty, after a sin of injustice; a salutary preventive of that which is greater and more direful than the whole calamitous flood of human evils, viz.: the spiritual ruin and death of the soul. Yes, Christians, although you were to bestow your entire property in alms to the poor, although you were to fast daily on bread and water, although you were to devote a great portion of your hours to prayer, and every month of your lives to approach the adorable Sacrament of the Altar,—if, notwithstanding all this, you failed to restore the property you had unjustly acquired, when it was in your power to do so,—or, lacking the ability, if you formed not, at least, the resolution of doing so at your first opportunity,—it would all profit you nothing, and the loss of Heaven would be the dreadful consequence of your dishonesty. Think of this, dear brethren, as you return home to-day, and if ever in your lives you have acted dishonestly, and not made compensation therefor,—form in-

stantly the determination of doing so before another day passes over your heads. Remember your salvation depends on it; think what would be your wishes at the hour of death, and *do now*, what you would then, perhaps, fruitlessly long to accomplish. What would it profit you to possess all the pearls of India, all the gold mines of Peru, in short, all the precious treasures, of both the earth and sea,—what would they all avail you, if, in the end, you lose your immortal soul? If we are not as wealthy, as talented, as rich in the goods of this world as others are, let us, at least, be honest. A just and upright character will merit for us the universal esteem of men, and, what is infinitely better, will obtain for us the blessings and approbation of heaven, the possession of which I sincerely wish you, my dear brethren, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Preached at Kingscove, Can., 1820.

VERY REV. JAMES SYNNOT, P. P.,  
Litter, County Wexford, Irel.

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### FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE OMISSION OF THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN IS A PARTICIPATION IN ITS GUILT.

*“While men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat; and went his way.” Matt. 13: 25.*

Having dismissed the people to whom our Lord had been speaking in parables, his disciples came to him saying: “Explain to us the parable of the cockle.” Yielding to their request, he said: “He that sowed good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of God; the cockle are the children of the world; the enemy is the devil, and the harvest, the end of the world.” The field is the world, a large field, indeed; and considering this field with its crops from the very beginning, we find no wheat that is not mixed with cockle.—Adam had a good, and a wicked son; Noah had two God-fearing sons, Shem and Japhet, but he had also a shameless Cham. Abraham harbored in his house Isaac and Ismael, the one was an adorer of the true God, the other an idolater. Christ had a Judas among his Apostles. The world is like a garden in which roses grow among thorns; like a net, in which there are not only large, but, also, small fish; like the ark, in which there were not only doves, but, also, ravens; or, to speak more plainly, the earth is between heaven and hell; in hell you find nothing but cockle, in heaven nothing but wheat; in the world, you find neither wheat nor cockle alone,

but wheat and cockle together; and herein, the modern world does not differ from the ancient world.

The servants, seeing so much cockle among the wheat, said to their master: "Master, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field, from whence then hath it cockle?" And he said: "An enemy has done this." "While men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat." Many whose duty it is to punish sin, close their eyes when they should keep them open, and these are as guilty before heaven as those who commit the sin. St. Ambrose says: God hates not only the sinner, but also him who does not punish sin, for if there were more to punish sin, there would be less to sin; therefore, I say:

*The omission of the punishment of sin is a participation in the guilt of that sin.*

God commanded Jeremiah to declare to the children of Israel their vices, and to conduct them into the right road, saying: "Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down, and to waste and to destroy, and to build, and to plant." Jer. 1: 10. In these words, God gave to Jeremiah a double authority; first, to root up and to pull down; secondly, to build and to plant; for if faults are not corrected and sins not punished, there is no fear among sinners, and where there is no fear of chastisement, you will see realized that which the Wise Man bewails: "Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evils without fear." The love of God should be a sufficient motive to lead us to avoid sin; but, because the love of God has grown languid in the hearts of men, he promises an eternal reward to the faithful observer of his commandments, and threatens to punish those who break them, with eternal torments. But there are many who believe neither in an eternal reward, nor in an eternal punishment; in order to keep such sinners within bounds, God gives power to the temporal authorities to inflict punishment upon the violators of his law. If every blasphemer were condemned to lose his tongue or his life, no one would dare open his mouth against God. If every theft and robbery were punished with the gallows, no one would steal or injure his neighbor's property; if public scandals, seduction of innocence, and drunkenness were followed by banishment or imprisonment, every one would be on his guard. But what happens instead? The wicked are allowed to run at large; no sentence is pronounced against the evil-doer, and thus it comes to pass, that God, who knows and sees all things, punishes the faithless superiors who neglect to correct and chastise the faults of those under their charge, as we read in Exodus: "If an ox was wont to push with his horn yesterday and the day before, and they warned his master, and he did not shut him up, and he shall kill a man or a woman, then the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death." Exod. 21: 29. By oxen, we under-

stand those who are under authority; if any of these are wicked, if they offend God or injure man, whose fault is it? Undoubtedly, the fault of the one who has authority over him, and thus the guilt rests on the head of the former, and he will be punished for the sins of others which he could have prevented, but did not.

This is no idle saying. God really punishes men for neglecting to correct those over whom they have charge. Samuel said to king Saul: "The Lord hath rejected thee from being king." Of what crime was he guilty? God had raised him from obscurity to the dignity of king over Israel. What evil had he done now, that he should be deprived of his regal authority? Was God angry with him for persecuting David, or for envying the latter when he slew Goliah? No; God rejected him from being king because he spared and pardoned Agog, the king of the Amalecites, who was worthy of death before the Most High. If Saul had inflicted a just punishment upon others, God would not have rejected him, but because he failed in his lawful duty as a superior, God rejected him from being king. In the third Book of Kings, (Chapt. 20th,) we read the sentence of death which God decreed against Achab for sparing Benadab, the king of Syria: "Because thou let go out of thy hand a man worthy of death, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people." Again, we read in the Book of Numbers, (Chap. 25th,) that God said to Moses: "Take all the princes of the people, and hang them upon gibbets against the sun." Why? What was the crime they had committed that deserved such a disgraceful death? Their only crime was, that they had overlooked the sins of the people. The people had prevaricated and offended God, and, consequently, should have been chastised, but the princes were too indulgent; and, therefore, they themselves were punished by being hung upon gibbets.

Parents, this is a word of warning, also, to you. God rejected Saul from being king, because he spared Agog. He pronounced sentence against Achab, because he did not punish Benadab; the princes were hung upon gibbets, because they indulged their people too much. What a rigorous account will parents have to give of the sins of their children! It is a tremendous labor to answer for ourselves, alone, but parents will have to answer not only for their own sins, but, also, for the sins of their children. Their crimes will be laid to their charge; their blood will be demanded at their hands. All the sins which children commit through the negligence of their parents, will not be laid only to their own charge,—the parents must, also, share the responsibility; for, not to prevent sin, is to participate in its guilt.

But, parents will say: Does not our Lord counsel mildness and meekness? "Learn of me to be meek." What else does Christian meekness require, but to have patience with the weakness of others; not to judge them, but to leave the judgment to God? It is true we must have patience with frailty and weakness, but it is, also, true that we must not countenance sin

in those intrusted to our charge, otherwise we make ourselves accessory to their sins. It is our duty to repress vice, wherever, and whenever, we can. Hear what St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Corinthians, Chap. 1: "Take the evil one away from among yourselves;" and in his Epistle to the Galatians: "I would those were cut off, who trouble you." Again: "Be instant in season and out of season, reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and doctrine." Behold how Christ treated the woman taken in adultery: "Go," said he, "and sin no more." He did not, however, treat all with the same indulgence; but, fired with a holy indignation, he punished the transgressors of the law most severely, as we read: "Jesus went up to Jerusalem and found sitting in the temple those that sold oxen, sheep, and calves, and the changers of money; and, when he had made a scourge of little cords, he drove them all out of the temple." From this, parents ought to learn to govern their children by love and fear.

If a sin be committed secretly and without scandal, and if an amendment may be reasonably expected, it is to be punished with patience, by exhortation and entreaty; but if the sin is public and scandal has been given or a repetition of the same sin is to be apprehended, it must be punished severely. You frequently get angry at trifles, at small accidents or losses caused by your children; you curse them and blaspheme God, as if he were the cause of it,—but, let me ask you, do you get angry at those sins of your children which offend God? Do you punish them when they deserve punishment? Do you not indulge your children too much? Do you not tacitly consent to their sins? The meekness of Moses is proverbial. This praise is given to him in the Scripture: "Moses was a man exceedingly meek above all men that dwelled upon earth." What bad Moses not to endure from his intractable people? How often did they not murmur against him, slight his commands, and violate his orders? They even sought his life. Moses bore all patiently, nay, when the anger of God was enkindled against this obstinate people, and, when he threatened their total extirpation, Moses offered himself a sacrifice to God for them, saying: "Either forgive them this trespass, or strike me out of the book that thou hast written!" What meekness! what love! to offer one's self as an expiation for a sinful people! Yet, this meek Moses was frequently angry. When he saw the Jews adore the Golden Calf, being very angry, he threw the tables of the Law out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the Mount; and laying hold of the Calf which they had made, he burnt it and beat it into powder, and gave thereof to the children of Israel to drink. And he cried with a loud voice: "If any man be on the Lord's side, let him join me." And when all the Levites had gathered themselves together around him, he said to them: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Put every man his sword upon his thigh, go and return from gate to gate through the midst of the camp, and let every man kill his brother, friend, and neighbor'." The Levites, doing as they had been ordered, there were

slain that day about three and twenty thousand men. And Moses said to them: "You have consecrated your hands this day to the Lord that a blessing may be given you."

Moses was exceedingly meek, but he could also be angry when the honor of God required it. O, that meekness were more frequently joined with severity; for, that is a culpable indulgence which suffers so many vices and crimes to pass unnoticed and unpunished. Hence, so much cockle among the wheat. What is the consequence of this criminal negligence? The fire breaks out into bright flames, because the spark is not extinguished in time; evils become incurable if not promptly remedied. There is more cockle in the field than wheat, because those whose duty it is to watch, are found sleeping. While men are asleep, the enemy comes and oversows cockle among the wheat. It is want of vigilance, want of timely correction. A child tells a lie; the parents laugh at it, and say: "It is only an innocent lie." The child takes something belonging to others, its parents will either not notice the theft or, else, say, "It is not worth talking about." But by little and little, these petty sins in children grow into great ones. Not having been corrected for his untruthfulness the first time, but rather encouraged by his parents, the young, smart, and hopeful son practises it again and again, till he contracts a habit of telling lies; he takes small things as often as an opportunity offers, till he becomes a thief, a robber, perhaps, a murderer. What is to be blamed for all this? The fatal indulgence of parents; and, whence does this ill-timed indulgence come? From a weakness of mind which fears to offend others,—from self-interest. But there is one thing certain; God will punish most severely that criminal indulgence which strives to please everybody and to displease nobody; for, he has said: "Cursed is he that does the work of God deceitfully," and he will not make his word void. Where justice reigns, injustice must perish; and where severity joined with meekness rules, iniquity cannot prevail. If you wish, my dear Christians, to be counted with the wheat, do not suffer the cockle to grow in your field; destroy it whenever it is your duty to do so; never countenance wrong in others, and thus become accessory to their sin; for, "The omission of the punishment of sin is assuredly a participation in its guilt."

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### FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### THE SLEEP OF THE SINNER.

"*While men were asleep his enemy came.*" *Matt. 13: 25.*

When Cæsar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, in the midst of wealth and opulence, and in the possession of everything the world could offer or the human heart desire, was troubled with sleeplessness, he was told by

one of his courtiers that a certain Roman Senator, who was greatly in debt, nevertheless slept well and soundly every night. The Emperor, at once, ordered the comfortable pillow of that unjust nobleman to be brought to him as a curiosity, saying at the same time, that he could not understand how a man, who was in debt for the bed on which he slept, could close an eye in sleep. I wish to present to you, to-day, my dear brethren, a greater marvel than this Roman Senator, whose calm repose under the heavy weight of debt and dishonor, so astonished the great Augustus. And you will fully understand the significance of the similitude, when I say that I cannot comprehend how the sinner, who daily contracts great and heavy debts with God, and who has not settled the arrears of many years' standing, can go to bed at night without fear and trembling, and expect to sleep. And, yet, he goes to sleep, although there is no member of his body, no faculty of his soul, wherewith he has not grievously offended his Creator and Redeemer. If that God whom he has so long and so boldly outraged, were to command his agents—death and the devil—to bring him, as debtor, before his tribunal, all would be lost. And yet, he sleeps, as it were, the sleep of the just man, and is disturbed by no tormenting dreams or apprehensions. How soft must be his pillow! I am not anxious, dear friends, like Augustus, to behold an object which could afford repose under such dire and distracting circumstances, but I cannot refrain from echoing (from a higher standpoint, however,) the Emperor's words of surprise, since I am unable to understand how a sinner, *whose body and soul belong to the devil*, can close an eye, or sleep for the space of a single hour. What, indeed, is more incomprehensible than the quiet sleep of that unhappy man who well knows that in losing his God, he has lost every thing, and who is perfectly aware that he sleeps on the brink of hell, into the flames of which he may fall at any moment!

In the happy state of sanctifying grace, before the commission of mortal sin, man is in such favor with God, that he is not his servant, but his friend: "You are my friends," says the Eternal Truth, "if you do the things that I command you: I will not now call you servants, but I have called you friends." John 15: 14. Nay, more, the faithful Christian is not only the friend of God, but his son, his heir to the kingdom of heaven, receiving through divine grace, the right and title to those wonderful dignities. "Behold, you are gods; and all of you sons of the Most High." Ps. 81: 6. Now, by the commission of mortal sin, man loses, at once, all those precious privileges, degrades his dignity, and forfeits his right and title to the celestial kingdom. From being a son of the Most High, he becomes his hated enemy and a slave of the devil. God acknowledges him no longer as his friend, his child, his heir, but protests and declares most solemnly: "I know you not." After having thus lost his priceless dignity of son and friend of God, together with his title to an immortal inheritance, one would suppose that the thought of this terrible misfortune would

deprive him of all sleep and repose. Ask *Lysimachus*, king of Thrace, who being, one day, tormented by a most violent thirst, sold his kingdom for a drink of water. Ask him, I pray you, how he felt,—ask him how he slept the following night, haunted as he must have been, by the perpetual remembrance that he was no longer a king, but a beggar,—that he had sold land and subjects, honors and dignities, sceptre and crown, for a few miserable drops of water! How can a sinner enjoy a sound sleep when he reflects that he is no longer a friend and child of God, no longer a prince of the celestial realm, but that he has sold his soul and salvation, heaven and his God, for a few drops of imaginary pleasure. “I have tasted but a little honey, and I must die,” said Jonathan. Ask *Esau* how he slept after he had eaten the mess of pottage for which he had exchanged his birthright and his father’s blessing. The Scripture says, in its strong and simple language, that “he roared out with a great cry.” Gen. 27: 34.

The sinner, too, has lost not only his birthright, but every privilege of an adopted child of God; hence, so far from enjoying a blessing, he can only expect the curse of his heavenly Father. If he die in that state, everlasting damnation must, inevitably, be his lot. But, unlike Esau, the sinner is not afflicted at his great loss, but sleeps soundly with Jacob, as if nothing had happened, as if he had an assurance of being able to recover what he has so criminally lost. But not only has he lost his glorious birthright, the inheritance of heaven,—alas! he has lost God, himself. The bond of love, by which he was so sweetly united to his Creator and Redeemer, is violently torn asunder; the sinner has rudely thrust God out of the sanctuary of his heart, and, in return, the unhappy wretch finds himself wholly excluded from the loving heart of God. It can no longer be said of him: “The Lord is with thee,” for, God is far from him. God and his grace can no more dwell in a sinful heart, than light can be united with darkness,—than the dove can dwell unharmed with the hawk, the sheep with the wolf, or the lamb with the devouring lion.

*Samson* lost God, and his wonderful strength, at once, departed from him.

*Mannasses* lost God, and with that loss, his liberty.

*Saul* lost God, and was deprived of his kingdom.

*Heli* lost God, and not only forfeited his priesthood, but falling backwards from his chair, was killed by breaking his neck.

*Ozias* lost God, and his health forsook him.

*Solomon* lost God, and losing his wisdom as well, became an idolater.

*The children of Israel* lost God, and, with their God, lost also their prosperity, their liberty, and their independence.

*Judas* lost God, and was deprived, in consequence, of his dignity as priest and apostle of Christ, and became, in the end, a miserable, despairing suicide.

The sinner has lost his God, and he rests quietly, he sleeps uncon-

cernedly and securely, as though he held in his hand a deed of his soul's salvation.

If a gambler stakes his all upon a throw, and loses all by one cast of the dice,—if one, having been rich, is suddenly reduced to poverty, what anguish, what restlessness, does he not experience the night succeeding his bitter loss! If a man's house, in which his all is invested, burns down in the afternoon, what kind of rest, think ye, my brethren, will he enjoy that night? Go, ask him the next morning, how he slept. What will his answer be? "What a silly question is that! How could I sleep well, remembering that in the space of an hour, I lost what it took me a life-time to acquire?" Tell me, when you lost your father, your mother, your husband, your wife, or, perchance, a darling child,—or when some other calamity, equally great, befell you, did you sleep much the following night? How many of your friends came to console you, and you refused to be comforted! Even for comparatively trifling losses, the people of this world will sometimes grieve immoderately. The loss of a jewel, a purse, a favorite animal, will often cost them many sleepless nights. St. Augustine says: "A man loses his cattle, his sheep, and he neither eats nor sleeps; he loses the grace of God, and he eats and sleeps and weeps not." But, behold, the sinner has lost, with the friendship of God, the right and title to heaven, his soul, and his salvation; and all the merits of his previous good works have been, as it were, consumed by infernal fire. He has lost God himself, and he sleeps soundly, and is altogether unconcerned. Is not this incomprehensible? Should he not cry out with Esau in the bitterness of his soul, and ask himself all night long the melancholy question, "Where is thy God?"

Not only has the sinner lost every real good which he possessed, but he has, also, every reason to fear the worst. Astonishing was the sleep of Jonas, the prophet, during a violent storm at sea. He went down into the ship, and slept a deep sleep. While the sea was raging and foaming, the waves rose mountain-high, and every one was filled with fear and consternation; Jonas, alone, slept calmly and quietly, as though the waves were a cradle, in which, like a slumbering child, he was lulled to sleep. And, yet, the wrath of God was directed against him, and was about to cast him forth into the depths of the stormy sea. Above him, was the vision of an enraged God,—beneath him, the foaming waves which were about to swallow him up, and still the unhappy prophet slumbered quietly and unconcernedly through it all.

Behold, O sinner, you, too, are the fatal target of the divine vengeance; you, too, are about to be cast into the sea of eternal perdition. Above you, appears the vision of an offended, outraged God, who, already, prepares to launch forth against you the arrows of divine justice; beneath your feet, hell opens its yawning jaws to devour you, and, yet, O marvel of marvels, you lie in your bed, night after night, and calmly sleep! God is your enemy, and you can forget his wrath in sleep. Remember: "It is an awful thing

to fall into the hands of the living God." God, who can destroy you at any moment, is your enemy, and you are able to forget his vengeance in sleep. A Roman cavalier, when he heard that Cicero, the renowned orator, would be his adversary in a case before the Roman senate, was so terrified as to commit suicide. And shall you, my brethren, esteem it a matter of indifference to have God for your enemy in that cause on which depends either your eternal salvation, or your eternal damnation?

What anguish, what fear, and consternation, are there not in a besieged city, when the enemy forces its gates! Now, faith teaches you that God's immensity surrounds you everywhere. God is above you, and below you, he is before and behind you, he is on your right hand, and on your left, nay, more, he is within you. If he wishes to punish you, with what arms will you defend yourself? How can you make merry before his wrathful countenance? Have you no living faith, O blinded sinners? Do you not believe in the omnipotence and omnipresence of your God? Well, then, throw away the grace of your holy Baptism, blot out your name for ever from the list of the faithful, from the Book of Life. But, if you, indeed, believe that God is your enemy, how can you sleep so carelessly under the curse of his enmity? Why do you not, at least, fear him whom you refuse to honor? How would it be if he gave the devil permission or command, to take your soul while you slumbered, even as, in the Gospel of this day, the enemy came whilst men were asleep, in the night? How, if this very night, whilst sleeping in your bed, your soul should be demanded with these terrific words: "Arise from sleep, and come to judgment!" How, if this very night, a stroke of apoplexy, or heart-disease should bring your life to a sudden and unexpected close? What, if a fire should break out in the night, and you should be permitted to perish in the flames? What, if burglars should break into your house and kill you? Have not these calamities frequently happened in the past? Isboeth, a son of king Saul, was stabbed and killed by two murderers in broad day-light, whilst he was sleeping on his couch; Jahel drove a nail through Sisera's head, whilst he was asleep; Judith cut off the head of Holofernes with his own sword, whilst he slept the sleep of the drunkard. Such things are happening, also, in all parts of the world. Who can give you the assurance, O sinner! that after so many and great transgressions of his divine law, God will not deal with you, this very night, in the same way? God is good and merciful, he is willing to forgive sin, but he cannot forgive the determination to commit sin. He forgives every man a certain number of sins, but, when the measure is full, he forgives no more, but punishes the sinner according to the rigor of his justice.

The Sacred Scripture says: "He lay down and fell asleep." Who?—Elias lay down under the shade of a juniper tree, and fell asleep. He could well do so, for Elias was a just man. But Isboeth, Sisera, and Holofernes, also, lay down and fell asleep, and never awoke again in this world. The

sinner, too, lies down and falls asleep,—but where? On the brink of an unhappy eternity, whence one stroke, one movement, one sudden fall will precipitate him, without fail, into the abyss of hell. He sleeps on the slender cobweb of hope, which is spread over the mouth of hell. But such a sleep, as you must see, dear Christians, is an incomprehensible sleep. A certain king in order to instil a salutary fear into one of his courtiers, made him sit on a worm-eaten chair which was placed over a raging fire, whilst above the unhappy man, a sharp sword was suspended by a horse's hair. Now, if the tyrannical prince had told his victim to sleep in that chair, what do you suppose would have been his answer? Would he not have cried out in anguish: "How can I sleep in so dangerous a situation! The chair is liable to give way under me at any moment; beneath me, is a fierce fire ready to devour me, and above my head, a cruel sword which threatens my life!" Sinner, above you, also, is suspended the sword of divine vengeance,—under your bed, hell is ever open to swallow you up; the devils stand ready to snatch you from among the living and to plunge you into that fiery abyss, and, yet, you have the bold presumption to sleep in the greatest security!

Incomprehensible, therefore, is the sleep of the sinner and for these two reasons; First: He has lost every good he possessed, the grace and friendship of God, the right and title to heaven, and even, alas! God himself. How, then, can he sleep securely? Secondly: He has to fear the worst from his enraged God who has the authority to call him to an account at any moment, and the power to inflict on him the punishment which his sins deserve,—the terrible, eternal punishment which so many millions of the reprobate are now, hopelessly, enduring in hell. How, I ask again, my dear brethren, how can he sleep? Before the sinner goes to bed each night, he ought to say to himself these solemn words, and ponder on them well: "*I belong to the devil, body and soul: I am not secure so long as I remain in mortal sin; my enemy may claim his prey at any moment, and what, then, will be my agonizing fate?*" "*Who can dwell with everlasting fire?*" But, strange to say, the sinner does not disquiet his mind with any such melancholy thoughts; he continues his sinful and criminal line of conduct, he sleeps on, like Jonas, until he is actually thrown out of the bark, yea, out of the bark of mortality, not, alas! into the stormy waves of that sea which swallowed up the prophet, but into the dreary pool of Gehenna, into the fiery, raging sea of hell!

In order to avert so great an evil, my beloved brethren, strive by a good Christian life and the frequent use of the Sacraments, always to go to bed in the state of sanctifying grace. If, (which God avert!) you should have, at any time, the misfortune of falling into mortal sin, and are unable that night to approach the Sacrament of Penance, make, at once, an act of perfect contrition with the resolution to go to confession at the very first opportunity that presents itself. Then, indeed, you may sleep in tran-

quillity and security. And even if the malice of the devil should overthrow your house in the night, and bury you in its ruins, though the calamity might destroy the life of your body,—your soul, your precious, immortal soul, thanks be to God! could suffer no loss. The sweetest rest of the Christian, dear brethren, is a good conscience, for a good conscience is a continual feast, and a soft pillow to sleep on. “Sweetly wilt thou take thy rest,” says the devout A’Kempis, “if thy heart reprehend thee not.” And if we strive with our whole hearts to keep the commandments of God and of his Church and to live in holy charity with our neighbor, each one of us, my dear friends, may exclaim at night as we stretch ourselves upon our beds: “‘I sleep, but my heart watcheth’ . . . . ‘In peace, in the selfsame I will sleep and I will rest.’” Amen.

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### SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### CROSS AND CROWN.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal.” Matt. 13: 33.*

What resemblance can the kingdom of heaven bear to the leaven of the Gospel? Is not the kingdom of heaven that blessed place of which our Lord has said to his Apostles and to us: “I appoint to you, as my Father hath appointed to me, a kingdom. That you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and may sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” Luke 22: 29.30. What shall we eat and drink at his table? We read in the Apocalypse, that the Lord says: “To him, that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna,” Apoc. 2: 17, that is to say, bread of such sweetness as the world has never known or tasted. In the desert, God gave to his chosen people such excellent bread, that the Book of Wisdom says of it: “Thou didst feed thy people with the food of Angels, and gavest them bread from heaven prepared without labor; having in it all that is delicious, and the sweetness of every taste.” Wisd. 16: 20. If the bread, that came from heaven, was so delicious, what sweetness must not that bread possess which God has reserved for the food of the elect at his heavenly table? How comes it, then, that our Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven? Heaven is delicious,—leaven is not. We will easily understand it, if we reflect what he means by the kingdom of heaven. He says in another place: “The kingdom of heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kinds of fishes: which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels; but the bad they cast forth.” Matt. 13: 47.48. Our faith teaches us, that

Christ in this parable does not refer to the Church-triumphant in heaven, where none abide save the elect,—but to his Church militant upon earth, in which both, good and bad, are dwelling together.

Again, in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew, he relates the following parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like to ten virgins, who, taking their lamps, went out to meet the bridegroom and the bride;—now, five of them were foolish; and five were wise.” Matt. 15: 1.2. This parable, also, has reference to the Church upon earth in which wise, *i. e.* the just; and foolish, *i. e.* the sinners, live together. As in these parables, Christ speaks not of the triumphant, but of the militant Church, so in this day’s Gospel, he compares the latter to leaven. “The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven,” which means that, as long as man lives in the Church of God here below, he will get no other than leavened bread. God condemned Adam and his whole posterity to eat that kind of bread. As soon as the first sin was committed, God said to Adam: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken; for, dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.” Gen. 3: 19. And who was it that thus leavened the bread for Adam and his posterity? The Gospel of this day says: “The woman took the leaven and hid it in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.” The first woman was the cause of the first sin upon earth; taking the leaven of disobedience, she prepared leavened bread for herself, her husband, and her posterity. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread.” Alluding to this, David cries out to the Lord: “How long wilt thou feed us with the bread of tears; and give us for our drink tears in measure?” Ps. 79: 6.

But, is there nothing that is able to sweeten this leavened bread, this bread of tears? The Gospel says: “The woman took leaven, and hid it in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.” There is, therefore, one measure of meal left to sweeten the three leavened measures. But, what is meant by the four measures of meal, and how can one measure of meal sweeten three leavened measures? The three measures of leavened meal, taken in the moral sense, refer to our temporal life; the first, being the beginning; the second, the progress: and the third, the end of our life; the fourth and last measure, we will find after the close of this present life, in heaven, (if we are so happy as to arrive there;) God having reserved it for that time and place, to make of it a bread, “having in it all that is delicious, and the sweetness of every taste,”—according to David, who says: “I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear.” Ps. 16: 15. Blessed is he that shall eat that delicious bread at the table of the Lord in his kingdom! And we are assured that all will be admitted to that table to eat the bread of joy, who, in this world, have humbly and resignedly partaken of the leavened bread, that is, the bread of tears.

A proof hereof is to be found in the third Book of Kings. Elias, being persecuted by the wicked queen Jezabel, fled into the desert, and sitting

down under a juniper tree, requested for his soul that he might die, saying: "It is enough for me, Lord; take away my soul." In other words: "What does a longer life profit me, except that I shall be persecuted the longer? Take away my soul, O Lord, for I am tired of life." But God, instead of sending death, cast a deep sleep upon Elias; and, after sleeping for some time in the shadow of the juniper tree, behold, an Angel of the Lord touched him, and said to him: "Arise and eat." He looked, and behold, there was at his head a hearth-cake, and a vessel of water; and he ate and drank; and he fell asleep again. And the Angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said to him: "Arise and eat; for thou hast yet a great way to go." And he arose, and ate, and drank; and walked, in the strength of that food, forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb. 1 Kings 19: 4-9.

A beautiful lesson for those who have to suffer much in this world; who have to labor hard for their daily bread. Some, indeed, have nothing in this world but the bread of affliction; they have, as it were, no earthly consolation; and, being tired of the world, they say sometimes with Elias: "'It is enough, O Lord, take away my soul.' If thou prolongest my life, what else will I see but the prolongation of my misery?" But God does not hear their prayer. Instead of dying, it is the will of God that they sleep, that is, their spirit must rest. And in what does the rest and peace of the spirit consist? In two things, the first of which is *conformity of our will to the will of God*; by this means, Elias enjoyed a sound and refreshing sleep. The second is *the eating of the bread which heaven sends*. What sort of bread does heaven send? The same that Elias found at his head,—a hearth-cake. But, how can a hearth-cake come from heaven? how can such bread pacify the mind? Such bread, I think, is calculated to represent death, it being a figure of death. Yes, that bread comes to us from heaven; for, whatever hand may offer you this bread of affliction, it is God who sends it to you;—no adversity, no cross, no affliction, can come upon you, unless God permit or decree it. Nothing happens in this world without the will or permission of God. The second question is, how can a hearth-cake, being a figure of death, pacify the mind? Just because it is a figure of death, it gives peace to the mind, for a moment's reflection will convince you that if you had to remain on earth, and eat the bread of affliction for ever, you would consider it a hell. But faith and your innate infirmity, your ceaseless tendency towards dissolution, teach you that this life will have an end; that you will have to eat this bread only for a short time; and this thought, alone, is sufficient to pacify and strengthen you on the way to heaven.

Elias ate twice of this bread. The Sacred Scripture says, that when he had eaten once, he fell asleep again; he was pacified and comforted, because he knew that the hearth-cake, although tasteless and bitter, came from heaven. Before he ate of it the second time, the Angel said: "Thou

hast, yet, a great way to go, unto the mount of God, Horèb." As soon as Elias heard this, he joyfully ate again of the bitter bread which strengthened him, so that he walked forty days and forty nights, till he came unto the mount of God, Horeb. The words of the Angel: "Thou hast, yet, a great way to go," are spoken not to Elias, alone, but to each and every one of us. My dear Christians, *you have, yet, a great way to go, from time into eternity, from mortality to immortality, unto the mount of God, Horeb*, that is, *heaven*; therefore, banish from you all depression of mind, bear the trials of this earth and the hardships incident to your state of life with patience and resignation to the will of God, eat the bitter bread which God sends you, and while eating it, think of the delicious bread which is prepared for you in heaven, a bread which contains the sweetness of every taste. This thought of a glorious future will strengthen you to bear patiently all the tribulations of this life, as the Apostle says: "While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for, the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal." 2. Cor. 4: 18. We must seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; we must mind the things that are above, and not the things that are below; we must control our thoughts, and refrain from fixing them on the adversities and afflictions of this present life, but think of the everlasting inheritance reserved for us in heaven. God ordered Noah to do this. What spectacle could be more heart-rending than that of the universal Deluge, when all creatures were perishing outside of the ark. God commanded Noah to put only one window in the ark, and *that* one, on the top. Why would he not permit him to make windows at the sides of the ark? Why did he order him to make but one window, and that, on the top? That he might not be able to look around at the earth and the things thereof, but would be forced to raise his eyes, his heart, and his thoughts up to heaven. If the ark had had windows at both sides, he would have seen man and beast struggling in the water and perishing in the waves; such a sight would have grieved his heart, and the bread of affliction which he was eating in the ark, would have tasted more bitter still. For this reason, God ordered him to make but one window on the top, that the sight of heaven, the only part of Creation left for him to behold, might sweeten his bitter bread.

The world and the things thereof seem sweet and delicious to the careless observer, yet, theirs is not a natural, but an artificial, sweetness. The sweetness of the world will be, one day, changed into bitterness, and the bitterness of the world, if properly endured, will be changed into heavenly sweetness. "Blessed are they, that mourn; for they shall be comforted." Matt. 5: 5. "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep." Luke 6: 25. If we fix our eyes continually upon the adversities of this life, we will shed tears of bitterness; but, if we turn them towards heaven, we will weep ceaseless tears of joy. Never to speak of heaven or

heavenly things, but always of the things of the world, may well make us weep and sigh; therefore, let the heart long to enter into the joy of the Lord, let the mouth speak of it, let all our desires be directed towards it, towards that blessed kingdom where our tears shall be wiped away, and our sorrow turned into joy.

Whilst a great famine prevailed in Chanaan and the neighboring countries, Jacob sent his sons twice into Egypt to buy grain for their sustenance. Prior to this season of want and suffering, Jacob had eaten the bread of affliction for twenty years, always thinking of his dearly beloved Joseph, whom he supposed to have been devoured by wild beasts. When his sons returned from Egypt the second time, with these happy and joyful tidings: "Joseph, thy son, is living; and he is ruler in all the land of Egypt; it is his desire to see you, his father,"—the Scripture says: "his spirit revived, and he said: It is enough for me if Joseph, my son, be yet living; I will go and see him before I die." Gen. 45: 26-28. And immediately, he set out on his journey, went to Joseph, and, notwithstanding his great age, he was permitted to eat the bread of joy for seventeen subsequent years.

The Lord visited Job with various crosses and afflictions, in order to try his virtue. He was very patient, but, after all, he was human, and he humbly confessed his feelings, saying: "Before I eat, I sigh." What made Job sigh? Was the bread he ate, perhaps, unjustly gotten? or did people whom he knew to be against him, eat with him? or did he feel no hunger for his food? None of these things caused him to sigh, for his guiltless conscience gave him testimony, that whatever he formerly possessed, as well as and honestly, of bread that yet remained to him, had been acquired justly the portion without any injury to his neighbor. That which made him sigh was the remembrance of the misfortune which had leavened his bread. He was contrasting the past with the present time; the past, when he had every thing his heart could desire; the present, when nothing was left to him but poverty and misery;—stripped of all his possessions, deprived of the comfort of his children, of the health of his body, he beheld himself, alas! covered with sores, and sitting upon a dung-hill;—these sad and sudden misfortunes, to which he was subjected, had so leavened his bread that he could say with truth: "Before I eat, I sigh."

It may be that you, my dear brethren, are not visited with the like disasters, that you have not to suffer the singular afflictions of Job, nevertheless, they are not few nor hard to find, who can justly say: "Before I eat, I sigh." Many have nothing to look forward to but suffering and hardship, and are doomed, in every sense of the word, to eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. Human weakness would be forced to surrender, human nature would be unable to bear all the adversities of this life, were not the Christian supported by the grace of God and strengthened by the thought of eternity. God lays on man no greater burden than he is able to bear; he feeds him with no more bread or tribulation than he can digest;

he supplies, by his grace, what is wanting to human nature. Again, the promise that the leavened bread of this life shall be followed by the delicious Bread of eternity, so strengthens our weakness, that, with patience and resignation to the will of God, the foretaste of the heavenly sweetness overcomes the bitterness of all temporal adversities and afflictions.

Who else is the ruler typified by the ancient Joseph but our Lord Jesus Christ?—who rules not only over the land of Egypt, but over all the earth, according to his own words: “All power is given to me in heaven and upon earth.” When we are visited by God with afflictions, it sometimes appears, as if our Redeemer had forsaken us: but he has decreed these same tribulations for us, that we may eat, dear brethren, the leavened bread of the Gospel. And, our comfort and consolation in all adversities and doubtful affairs, are the joyful tidings that “*our Redeemer liveth.*” He is living, and shall live for ever. If we eat the bread of tribulation with patience here, we have his assurance that we shall eat the bread of joy hereafter. Let us in all our troubles and difficulties say with Jacob: “It is enough, I know that my Redeemer liveth, I will go and see him, before I die.” I will go and receive him in holy Communion,—he is the Bread having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste, and I will unite myself with him for time and for eternity. Amen.

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### SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

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#### SINS OF WHICH LITTLE ACCOUNT IS MADE.

“*The grain of mustard seed becometh a tree.*” *Matt. 13: 32.*

Little things in time become great, both, in the natural and supernatural order. What is smaller and more insignificant than a grain of mustard seed, yet, in the course of time it, becomes great, it becomes a tree, in the branches whereof the birds of the air dwell. Only a small quantity of leaven is needed to put a mass of flour into fermentation. We must not condemn little things; be they ever so tiny and trivial, they may become great. The grain of mustard seed is very minute, but it carries within it the germ of something great; a little leaven has the virtue of changing a tasteless mass of flour into palatable bread. In the supernatural order, there are also certain things which are regarded by many as trifles,—nay, as points unworthy of notice, and, yet, after all, they are very important. Such, for instance, are a great many sins. Some allow themselves to be so deluded by their passions or the bad example of others, as to consider practices which are very sinful, either as no sin at all, or, at most, as but small defects, or natural imperfections. The consequence is, that such

Christians in their unhappy delusion heap sin upon sin, and will discover their mistake only when it is too late to rectify it, when they open their eyes in that miserable eternity whence it is impossible ever to escape.

*And what are these sins which many Christians consider so trifling?*

I. *The sins of the heart.* These sins are bad thoughts and desires which are entertained voluntarily, and indulged in with pleasure. He who represents to himself something unchaste and takes pleasure therein, sins by bad thoughts. He who not only represents to himself something bad, but also desires to see that forbidden sight, to hear those forbidden words, or to resolve that evil thought into action,—sins by bad desires, as well as by bad thoughts. Now, there are many Christians who commit these sins of the heart very often, and without any disquietude of conscience. They have vain, proud, revengeful, avaricious, envious, unchaste thoughts and desires; they entertain them with pleasure; they take no pains to banish them, imagining such thoughts and desires to be of little or no account, considering them either as no sin at all, or only as trivial, venial sins. What a pernicious error! God looks far more to the will than to the deed. If exteriorly, you lead the life of a saint, but have a corrupt heart, God abhors you, and according to the words of Christ, you resemble “whited sepulchres which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men’s bones and of all filthiness.” With God, the will goes for the deed. If entertained deliberately, with pleasure, and in some important matter, bad thoughts and desires, like bad deeds, are mortal sins. Therefore, it is said in the Book of Proverbs: “Evil thoughts are an abomination to the Lord.” Prov. 15: 26. And Christ says: “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Great is the number of those who, making little or no account of evil thoughts and desires, neglect to confess them, and consequently live and die in sin, and perish eternally. The rebellious angels were cast out of heaven and condemned to eternal torments—for what?—for entertaining a proud thought only for an instant.

II. *Sins of Blasphemy.* There are many Catholics who would die, before they would eat meat on Friday, but, while dissecting their fish, they do not hesitate to utter blasphemies, using the holy name of Jesus with an open profanity which should cause the most hardened to shudder. It is a wide-spread impression throughout the United States that drunkenness is the vice of the people, and the cause of all their troubles; but, this is a delusion. The habit of blaspheming is more general than the habit of drunkenness; and the consequences of the former vice are most terrible. The wrath of God is upon the violators of the Second Commandment; and, when a man begins his downward course, it is often because he used the holy Name, day after day, hour after hour, only to blaspheme it.

One will find, everywhere, frugal, thrifty, hardworking men who leave their homes at five or six o'clock in the morning, and on account of the distance to their place of toil do not return until late in the evening. These men do not drink, they work continually and lead a life of almost heroic self-sacrifice, but, they swear like troopers. It only needs a small provocation to cause them to burst out in oaths and curses, and to vomit forth, as it were, the very sulphur of hell. What a strange inconsistency! The same men who would rather die than eat meat on a Friday, will take the name of their Redeemer in vain, if their pipe-stem but break.

On the platform of a Third Avenue car in New York, a gentleman lately heard a conversation on religious matters, carried on in the richest Cork brogue: "God damn my soul! I am a Catholic, and God damn me, I'll stick to it!" This is only one of many similar profane professions of Faith, caught up at random, here and there; and in this case, the man was not drunk. The vice of blasphemy is as useless as it is horrible. An inebriate may find some sensual pleasure in intoxication; may drown his troubles, for a while, in a bestial way, by saturating himself with alcohol, but what possible pleasure can any one be afforded by letting forth a volley of imprecations in the name of his Creator, his God, and Saviour. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain." A man obeying the command of the Church may scrupulously abstain from eating meat on Friday, but what will his abstinence profit him, if every day of his life he break a higher Commandment, no less binding?

Blasphemy is the giant evil of America, and it cannot fail to bring a curse on the land where it breeds. It is a horrible reflection to consider how many men, and even women, in this great country, hourly call upon God and his Son, to damn them, their friends, their acquaintances, their enemies!

III. *The sins of omission.* By omission, we sin, when through our own fault, without a valid excuse or reason, we neglect to do what we are bound to do. Many neglect their duties of religion; they are lukewarm and slothful in the business of their salvation, omit their morning and evening prayers, or say them carelessly; all their thoughts and affections are set upon earthly things, and they give themselves up to the distractions of a worldly life. Of God, of their souls and eternity, they think but seldom. They find no relish in spiritual reading; they hardly ever listen to a sermon; they neglect to hear Mass on Sundays ten or twelve times in the year; they put off the reception of the Sacraments till Easter, and in many other ways, they disregard their religious duties or fulfil them thoughtlessly and imperfectly.

*Many parents neglect the duties of their state of life.* Great is the number of those parents who are guilty of omissions in the training of their children. They do not see to it that their children say their morning and

evening prayers; that they go to Mass and Sunday School on Sundays, and receive the Sacraments at stated times; they permit them to dress extravagantly, to be out at unseasonable hours, to entertain bad company, to be too familiar with persons of the opposite sex, and to carry on immodest discourses and indulge in sinful pleasures. How many children are self-willed, disobedient, and stubborn, and are not corrected and reprimanded and punished in time! These, and many other sins of omission, are treated as trifles; and parents commit them, again and again, and fail to make them the subject of accusation in confession. We have an example of a sinfully weak, and over-indulgent parent in Heli. He neglected his duty towards his children, even after God, by his prophet, had threatened him with the severest chastisements. Many spiritual writers assert that more people will be damned for sins of omission than of commission.

IV. *Sins against justice and charity are little regarded.* Justice requires that we give to every one what belongs to him, that we take no advantage of any one, that we do not steal, cheat, nor injure any one in his property. He that has sinned in any way, whatever, against the rights of others, is bound to make restitution and to repair the damage done; and unless he performs this act of justice, his sins cannot be forgiven. Many, indeed, are the sins committed against justice. Who is able to count all the injustices committed by merchants and traders? Goods are adulterated and sold as genuine and pure articles; serious defects in merchandise are concealed, and buyers cheated; the highest price is asked for goods; charges for work done are exorbitant, and those who commit these sins live quietly and unconcernedly, as if everything were in order. If, at times, their conscience is aroused, or, if in sermons, or in the Confessional, attention is called to these injustices and sinful practices, they console themselves with the thought: "These things cannot be wrong; how else could one get along? Others are doing the same." There are many who acknowledge their injustices, but are not willing to make restitution. They think they can shirk the obligation of making restitution, by saying that it is impossible for them to do so, and, yet, it would be possible, if they only had the will, or tried to repair the past by giving alms, or contributing something for a charitable purpose. What a delusion! Injustice is, and always will remain, injustice, whether many or only a few are guilty of it; and every injustice must be repaired. Again, there are many who sin not only against justice, but, also, against charity. Like the Jewish priest and Levite of the Gospel, who left the young man that fell among robbers, helpless and half-dead by the roadside, they have no sympathy or compassion for their poor neighbor. They do not relieve him in his pressing need, although they could easily do so without any inconvenience to themselves; nay, only too often, in their business-dealings with the poor, they take advantage of their necessity to

sell to them at exorbitant prices, and to buy from them at only half the real value of their goods. Their mode of acting may appear right in their own eyes; but in the eyes of God, it is criminal. "Judgment without mercy to him who hath not done mercy." Matt. 25: 41.

V. *The profanation of Sundays and holydays is another sin which people generally make little of.* Sundays and holydays are to be kept holy. We must abstain from all servile work, unless there be absolute necessity; and we are bound to hear Mass under the penalty of mortal sin. We should also attend Vespers and Benediction, for Sunday is the Lord's Day, and we should devote it to the service of the Lord. We are bound to do this by the laws of God and of his Church. But, in how many ways do not people abuse or violate these divine and ecclesiastical ordinances! Many Catholics do not keep holy the Sundays and holydays, and, yet, they are not troubled in the least, nor disquieted in their conscience; they do not accuse themselves of this neglect in the Confessional, and, if they do, they make the accusation without contrition and a firm purpose of amendment,—as is evident, after confession, from their careless and criminal conduct. They imagine, that, having confessed it, all is right, although God and the Church say, that all is wrong. And why do they not amend their lives? Because of the bad example of others. They see others neglect Mass, and they do the same, taking the blind for their guides. At one time, the desecration of the Sabbath-day had become general among the Israelites, and the Lord said: "They grievously violated my Sabbaths, I said, therefore, that I would pour out my indignation upon them in the desert and would consume them;" and so he did, for, of all those who left Egypt, (with the exception of Josue and Caleb,) hundreds of thousands of people died in the desert and never entered into the promised land of Chanaan. Go, and make little of your neglect of Mass on Sundays, of your profanation of the Lord's day, but I tell you, on account of the profanation of Sundays and holydays, many Catholics will die an unhappy death and perish eternally.

VI. *Finally, those sins are made light of which are attended by no serious consequences; those sins which seem to cause no particular damage, but which, on the contrary, may even bring a temporal advantage.* Many are given to telling lies, "white lies," innocent lies, (as they call them;) and they will assure you that such untruths are not sinful, inasmuch as they hurt no one. Others take false oaths in order to do a favor to a good friend, and to extricate him from some trying predicament. Such false oaths which are common in judicial transactions of assault and battery, in defrauding the government of custom, of internal revenue and taxes, are in the eyes of many, not criminal, or, at least, excusable, because, as they say, they do a good turn to one's friends. This is, also, their judgment,

dear brethren, of many other sins; if they cause no damage, but rather an advantage, they are looked upon as trifling things. Actions are usually judged by their success; however grievous certain designs may be in themselves, they are approved of, if successfully carried out. Wicked, cunning men are, therefore, applauded when they trample human and divine rights under foot, and, not being deterred from the commission of any wickedness, boldly accomplish what they take in hand. What a delusion! A sinful action is bad, and remains bad, however profitable or favorable, (humanly-speaking,) the result may be. Judas, by his treason, Pilate, by the condemnation of Christ to be crucified, and the Jews, by the Crucifixion—have rendered an immense service to mankind, for thereby, they caused the redemption of the human race to be accomplished. But, are they without sin on that account? What sane man would believe this? St. Augustine says: “It is not lawful to tell a lie on any consideration, if, thereby, even the salvation of a man, nay, the salvation of the whole world could be achieved.” Henry the Eighth desired to be separated from his lawful wife, Catharine of Aragon, in order to marry the Queen’s maid of honor, Anne Boleyn. He applied to the Pope for the dissolution of his marriage with Catharine. But, the marriage being valid, the Pope could not annul it without violating the divine law, and, therefore, he resisted the demand of the king. The dissolute monarch, blinded by his vile passion, disregarded the Pope’s refusal, repudiated the virtuous Catharine, and married Anne. Nor did he stop here. In his anger, he abolished the Papal jurisdiction in England, and, finding a pliant tool in a servile Parliament, arrogated to himself all spiritual supremacy over the English establishment. He persecuted all Catholics who would not acknowledge his unwarrantable assumption of spiritual power: many were put to death; among whom we might mention those holy martyrs, Bishop Fisher and the Chancellor, Sir Thomas More. Thus, English Protestantism was conceived in lust and cradled in murder. Had the Pope been as pliant in this affair as Luther was to the Landgrave of Hesse, he might have prevented the great English defection, and all England and her dependencies would be Catholic to day. But he could not, and, therefore, did not grant the king’s request, because it was contrary to the laws of God: “What God hath put together, let not man put asunder.” He knew that it was not lawful to do evil, if, thereby, even the greatest calamity could be averted, or the greatest good obtained.

No man becomes a saint in a night’s time; and no one becomes bad at once, but by little and little. Therefore, dear Christians, do not disregard little things; the rivulet becomes a river, by and by. Venial sin is a great evil, because God is thereby offended; we are deprived of many graces by it, and draw severe punishments on ourselves in this world and the next. Venial sin leads to mortal sin. Resolve never to commit a venial sin, knowingly and willingly. The devil is satisfied with a hair in the beginning;

he has ways and means of his own to obtain more by degrees; by and by, he will make a rope of the hair, wherewith he will, one day, try to draw you, my brethren, into perdition. If through surprise or inadvertence, you have committed a fault, repent of it at once, and resolve for the future to be more prudent and careful, so as to commit it no more. Walk in the fear of God and avoid everything that is sinful, be it little or great, that you may be able to stand before the tribunal of him, who shall demand an account of every idle word.

Altered and adapted from J. E. Z.

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### SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

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#### DISCONTENT.

*“And when they received the penny, they murmured against the master of the house, saying: These last have worked but one hour; and thou hast made them equal to us that have borne the burden of the day and the heats.” Matt. 20: 11.12.*

I see to-day, in spirit, my dear brethren, a vast multitude of workers; I seem to behold the hands of all busily engaged in erecting a magnificent building. The structure rises higher and higher, but, strange to say, it is never completed; for, whenever it has reached a certain height, it falls in ruins to the ground. Sometimes this calamity is caused by raging storms, sometimes, through the fault of the builders themselves, who neglected to lay a solid foundation for so lofty a structure, and who, in punishment of their carelessness, must see the work of their hands come to nothing. “Like to a man building his house upon the earth, without a foundation; against which the stream beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.” Luke 6: 49. What building is it, my dear friends, in the erection of which the hands of all are engaged in vain? It is the house of Happiness, which all men endeavor to build, and in which all wish to dwell, but the building of which many leave unfinished,—the completion of which very few ever live to see. The laborers in the Gospel of to-day, who murmured against the householder and the master of the vineyard, and who were dissatisfied with his method of payment, have many imitators in this unhappy world. How seldom do we find one who is really satisfied with his lot, who has no wish or desire for that unattainable *something* which he imagines would complete his happiness! Everywhere we meet with *disgust and dissatisfaction even in the most favorable circumstances of life,—with discontent, pusillanimity and despondency in sufferings and afflictions,—yea, even with a rebellious and disconsolate spirit in the*

**SOLEMN HOUR OF DEATH.** What a miserable state of affairs is this! How universal this wretched discontent which pervades all states and conditions of life! It does, indeed, represent the dark, cloudy night-side of the human heart.

I. “If I had been present at the creation of the world, I should have given some good advice to the Creator,” was once said by Alphonso, King of Castile, in a moment of reckless indignation, and this utterance has been stigmatized as blasphemy by the whole civilized world. And yet, my brethren, if we calmly and carefully analyze the spirit of discontent, by which man, being led astray by self-love, finds fault with the decrees of heaven and with the organization of human society,—we will discover that only too many so-called Christians, by their rebellious murmurs and presumptuous complaints, are continually echoing the sentiments of the blasphemous King of Castile. To such discontented people God said once, by the mouth of the prophet Isaias: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways, my ways, for, as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above yours, and my thoughts above your thoughts.”

This restless dissatisfaction,—this envious discontent, which pervades the life of the soul, as the veins do the organism of the body, may be said, to creep even into the dwellings of those who are blessed with the external goods of fortune; it exercises its power amid the thunderbolts of human calamities, and accompanies man with its depressing bitterness, even to the gate of Eternity. This secret poison manifests its existence *under the form of unhappiness even in the most favorable circumstances of life.* Follow me, in spirit, dear friends, to Egypt, into the royal abode of King Ptolemy the Second. He stands musing at one of the windows of his palace, regarding with interest a crowd of peasants on the banks of the river Nile. They are engaged in taking their frugal dinner. Unconscious of the king’s observation, they sit in a circle upon the grass, eating their black bread and onions, and quenching their thirst with water from a neighboring fountain. Ptolemy wonders within himself, how those poor creatures can be so contented, having hardly anything to eat, and their trifling sustenance procured by dint of the hardest labor. But, after their frugal meal, he beholds them indulge cheerfully in their little sports, wrestling, like careless children, upon the green meadow. The king is visibly moved and a tear gathers slowly in his eye. “Why this grief and sadness which we notice on your royal countenance”? questions one of his attendant courtiers. “Because the king is not allowed to be a peasant,” replies the unhappy Ptolemy.

Again, my dear brethren, who was ever deemed happier than the ancient Solomon? He was the king of Israel, and his reign was attended by universal peace and great abundance; his treasures were countless, his knowledge and piety, the wonder of the world. The queen of Sheba visited

him in his royal palace, and was lost in admiration of his splendor and glory, and she was so amazed at his wisdom and holiness, that she pronounced the servants blest who were always in his presence. (2. Paralip. 9.) There was no rivulet of pleasure out of which he did not drink to his heart's content, and yet, there is a dissatisfaction, a restless uneasiness, ever consuming his heart; he is drawn by his desires from pleasure to pleasure, but, amid all his royal delights, he finds not the essential elements of all true happiness,—peace and repose of mind. In the end, he confesses out of the fulness of a wearied and satiated heart, that “all is vanity of vanities and affliction of spirit,” save to love God and to serve him alone. Behold, again, my dear brethren, that celebrated king and conqueror, Alexander the Great, reigning in the midst of opulence and riches, possessing the marvelous treasures of Asia, and enjoying all possible mundane pleasures. He has every thing that his heart desires, but he is not contented, not satisfied; he sighs continually for fresh worlds to conquer; and so, he sets out for the conquest of India and the wealth thereof, but all the treasures of the Orient fail, alas! to make *him* happy whose soul is possessed with the brooding demon of discontent.

The history of these great kings, heroes and sages, portrays vividly to us the universal malady of man. His insatiable thirst for happiness drives him about in a continual circle of desires, enjoyments, and disappointments. He is like an exhausted traveller who traverses the bank of a creek, always seeking for a convenient place to quench his thirst, but never finding a spot that thoroughly suits his fastidious tastes. And so he lies down in the end and perishes with exhaustion, even within sight of the cooling waters. No matter how liberal and bounteous fortune may be in the distribution of her external goods and gifts, where and who is the man to whom there is nothing wanting, who does not, amid all his abundance and luxury, continually sigh for more? Yes, strange as it may appear, those men who are apparently the most affluent and exalted, are, generally speaking, the most discontented. If you could but hear the groans and lamentations which resound through many a splendidly-furnished apartment;—if you could but see how the spoiled and flattered darlings of fortune restlessly roll about upon their sumptuous couches,—how discontent and bitter dissatisfaction change all the sweetness of their daily delights into wormwood and gall, and how often they would need a David with his harp, to banish from their side that gloomy guest and companion, Melancholy,—I am sure, my dear brethren, that far from envying them their false, uncertain pleasures, you would rather pity them with all your hearts.

II. The second form under which the spirit of discontent makes its appearance, *is dejection and deadly sadness in misfortune.* We read in the Book of Kings, dear friends, of that sad day when, in the desert of Bersebe, a prophet of the Lord sat solitary and subdued, under the shade of a juniper

tree. All the Prophets of the Lord had fallen by the sword of Achab. Elias, alone, remained, but he, too, alas! was doomed to die, because he had provoked the anger of Achab and Jezabel by his admonitions, and had caused by his command, the slaughter of the false prophets of Baal. Elias flees to Bersebe, he wanders about the desert for the space of a day, and, at length, overcome by hunger and fatigue, he sits down, as we have said, in the shade of a juniper tree. All the courage of his recent heroic exploits has departed from him, and in the sadness of his heart, he mournfully exclaims: "It is enough for me, O Lord, take away my soul. Let me die." Is not this dejection of Elias, in many respects, a true picture of our own despairing depression? When visited even by comparatively light afflictions, instead of bearing them with humble patience, we fret and complain continually; when heavy trials cast their dark shadows over us, instead of *standing*, as Mary did, erect under the cross, we fall weakly and faint-heartedly to the ground; full of a bitter rebellion against suffering, we grow discontented with our lot and wildly wish to die, not in order to be sooner united to God, but simply to be released from the burden of our woes. We say: Why this bitter chalice for *me*? Why am *I* afflicted with this poverty, this sickness? Why have *I* to suffer so much? What have *I* done to deserve this cruel disgrace? These questions we dare to ask our Creator, in our reckless presumption and discontent. Dissatisfied man, why do you complain so bitterly? Because you do not love the cross, because you are not willing to suffer the most trifling affliction,—because, in your miserable selfishness, you wish only to enjoy life, and have (what you term,) a good time of it here below. But do you not pretend, then, to be a follower of Christ, who says in the clearest words: "If you wish to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me?" Do you not know, in short, that by sufferings we must enter into glory, and that in your patience you shall possess your souls? We may have to bear the heat and burden of the day, it is true, dear brethren, but, have courage! the evening of death is approaching, the Master of the celestial Vineyard is drawing near, from whose hands we shall receive, if faithful, the penny of life everlasting. Therefore, support with patience, if not with cheerfulness, the tribulations of this world, in the hope of a better life, the endless joys of which await you. Be satisfied with the dispensations of God's providence; and often reflect upon those consoling words of Solomon, wherein he tells us: "In the good day, enjoy good things, and beware beforehand of the evil day, for, God hath made both the one and the other, that man may not find against him any just complaint."

Even granted for a moment, my dear brethren, that God would go so far as to renounce his own will in order to conform himself to yours,—would you be perfectly contented withal? David entered Saul's camp to fight Goliah. Saul clothed him with his own garments, forthwith, and putting a helmet of brass on his head, armed him completely with a coat of

mail. And David, having girded his sword upon his armor, began to try if he could walk in armor; for he was not accustomed to it. And David said to Saul: "I cannot go thus, for I am not used to it. Give me my staff, my scrip and sling, for I am accustomed to these, and with these I will fight the giant,"—and glorious was his victory. The application of this parable is easy enough, but man's mind is perverted, although he sees that the belongings, the lot, the talents of others, would not be as useful for the advancement of his eternal interests as his own individual gifts, nevertheless, he always murmurs and complains, and is never satisfied with his condition.

III. The third form under which the spirit of discontent manifests itself, is an *unwillingness to die*. Follow me, again, in spirit, dear brethren, into the interior of a royal palace,—nothing less than the magnificent abode of the king Ezechias. Alas! the good old monarch is at the point of death. The prophet Isaias stands before him, saying: "Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die." Ezechias, hearing these solemn words, turns his face to the wall and weeps bitterly, for he is attached to life, and although the Lord demands it of him, he is not willing to surrender it. Ezechias is a true picture of the generality of men; they are discontented with the dispensations of Providence all through their natural lives, and they continue discontented, even to the hour when they enter upon the awful boundaries of eternity. It is only by compulsion that they can be brought to submit themselves to the law of stern necessity. The old man bowed down with age and the stripling in the flower of his youth, alike exclaim: "Must I die so soon? Why am I not allowed a longer respite, since life, at the best, is full only of miseries and disappointments? Why must I be separated so abruptly from wife and children and home, from friends and relatives, from everything, in short, that is near and dear to my heart?" Thus they complain like Ezechias, thus they turn their faces to the wall, and, weeping, bewail their inevitable fate. They murmur rebelliously, because they are unable to distinguish between the visible and the unseen; because they are unable to separate the destiny of this mortal and corruptible body from the delights of the immortal and incorruptible life of the soul. Why do they not look above this finite and most miserable abiding-place, to the infinite and most exquisite joys of their heavenly home, exclaiming with the Apostle of the Gentiles: "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's?" Why do they not cry out with generous cheerfulness and submission: "Lord to thee I live, as long as thou willest me to live; I am ready to die, when thou willest me to die!" To act otherwise, is to comport ourselves, (as the Sacred Writer declares,) as men who have no hope.

But whence, dear friends, arises this prevailing and all-pervading discontent? When did this monster take up its habitation among the children of men? Is it a thing of yesterday? Whence, I repeat, is its origin?

Where do you seek it, and where will you, infallibly, find it? Is it not in that fatal spot where the first tear was shed, the first sigh was heaved, the first drop of sweat falling from the unhappy laborer's brow, moistened the arid soil? Our holy faith tells us so. The four rivers of the garden of Eden have changed into countless rivers of tears, and, out of the fountains of Adam's misery, have carried woe into all the universe. Scarcely was the first sin committed, when remorse of conscience began. The source and origin of discontent is found in sin, for, as by sin all evil entered into the world, so also this crying evil of discontent. Sin is the sword that pierces the heart and makes it secretly bleed; it is the crown of thorns which is rudely pressed upon our heads; it is the disruption of the golden bond between God and man; it is the dislocation of man's whole moral and intellectual life,—the bitter and ever-present reminder of our sad mortality.

The root of all discontent is sin. What original sin in the beginning, brought into the world, is continued and perpetrated by actual sin. The development of our follies is the growth of bitter fruits from that first bitter seed. Tell me why I behold around me so many discontented souls, who are not only a burden to themselves, but to all connected with them? There was a time when they were full of courage and hope, when, with a good conscience and a light heart, they looked up to heaven, and lived in peace with God and man. All this, alas! is sadly changed. I now hear them complain, like the prodigal son, "How good it was, once, of old, in my father's house!" Ah, then, (I say,) poor soul! you admit that you have left your Father's house,—that you have been disobedient to the Church? You have given credit to the flattery of sin? Nay, more, you have drunk of the poisoned chalice of lust? Yea, acknowledge humbly that you have sinned. You cannot deny it. Your former cheerfulness has departed, your countenance is downcast, your discontent itself, betrays you. You are sitting forlorn by the rivers of Babylon, you sigh deeply, when you think of Sion and weep when you are asked: "Where is your God?" Hence, do not complain, my brethren, of God or of man; do not inveigh against the world, nor the bad times, nor your enemies, nor your afflictions. Blame only yourselves. The prime source of all your disorders is in your own bosoms, in your own hearts, which have basely forsaken God, and digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Strike, then, your breasts in humble contrition, and since you have imitated the prodigal son in his sin, imitate him, also, in his repentance,—turn from your evil ways and return to your God, crying with bitter tears: "*Peccavi! Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am not now worthy to be called thy son!*" Weep for yourselves and for your sins, my dear brethren; rend your hearts and not your garments, and be converted truly to the Lord; work whilst you have time, for "the night cometh, when no man can work." John 9: 4. Cry out to Jesus whom you have shamefully forsaken and betrayed: "Lord, save me, I perish!" He is your strength and con-

solation, he is your physician, he will say to you with tenderness: "Weep not." Behold a high-priest like unto ourselves in all things, save in sin! He has had experience of our sorrows, he can sympathize with our every pain. Why was he deluged in Gethsemane with such a sea of bitterness? Why did he sigh? Why did he permit the anguish he endured to force a sweat of blood from every pore of his sacred body? Why was his blessed soul sorrowful even unto death? O, my dear brethren! it was in order to free us from our sins, and to merit for us by his cruel sufferings, a peace and contentment such as the world can never, never give. Nor could the Agony in the Garden set a limit to his redeeming love. Ah! no, Jesus, our Lord and God, suffered and died for our sins on Calvary's Mount, to the end that he might impart to us, both here and hereafter, the sweetest rest and peace and joy. By taking away sin, the cause of all the evil in the world, he strove to pluck out the thorns from every human life, that they might no longer have power to wound his well-beloved children. Were it not for sin, the rose would have no thorns,—hence, if we banish sin out of our hearts, the rose-bush of life will straightway be divested of all its cruel thorns.

Go, then, my dear brethren, without delay, to the true physician of your souls. Do not be deceived. Do not believe, that you can find peace, happiness, or real contentment in this deceitful world, neither in the concupiscence of the eyes, nor in the concupiscence of the flesh, nor in the pride of life. It would be a useless and fruitless endeavor. You must go, like little children, to your poor despised Jesus, and suffer him to put on you his own simple garment of humility; you must take your cross upon your shoulders and follow him in the holy way of his cross up to Calvary's Mount, that is, to the end of your mortal life; and thus, in suffering, in humiliation, in Christian detachment, I promise you, my brethren, you will find that delicious rest and peace which your souls so ardently desire, in life and death, in time and in eternity. Amen.

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### SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

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#### THE CALL OF THE LABORERS AND THE PAYMENT OF THEIR HIRE.

"*Call the laborers, and pay them their hire.*" *Matt. 20: 8.*

The master of the family, mentioned in the parable of this day's Gospel, is intended to represent to us God; the market place, the world; the vineyard, the Church. Those who were called into the vineyard, represent all mankind; the laborers in the vineyard, all faithful Christians; and the steward is Jesus Christ, who pays every laborer a penny, that is, bestows on every

elect soul, the reward of life everlasting. The master of the family is said to have gone forth at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and the eleventh hours. The ancient Jews and Romans computed time differently from what we do. They commenced the day not at twelve o'clock at night, (as is *our* custom,) but in the morning, with the rising of the sun; so that their first hour, according to our reckoning, was six o'clock in the morning; their third was nine o'clock, their sixth, twelve o'clock or noon, their ninth, three o'clock in the afternoon, and their eleventh hour, consequently, five o'clock in the evening. Hence, as you see, my dear brethren, we are six hours ahead of the ancient Jews and Romans in our computation of time. When it is said, therefore, that Jesus died at the ninth hour, it is not nine o'clock in the morning that is meant, but three o'clock in the afternoon. After this preliminary explanation, let us proceed to consider the parable, fixing our attention in a special manner,

- I. Upon the call of the laborers into the vineyard, and*
- II. Upon the payment of their hire.*

I. According to the holy Fathers and the interpreters of the Sacred Scripture, we may understand the various hours of the day at which the master of the family went forth to hire laborers into his vineyard, to mean, in one sense, the whole space of time from the creation of the first man to the days of Christ and his Apostles; and in another sense, to represent the life of each individual person from his birth to his death.

1. *Early in the morning he went forth to hire laborers into his vineyard.* The early morning means the time from the creation of the world to the age of Noah. God had created Adam and Eve, not only for the earthly paradise, but, also, for heaven. That they might merit it, in some measure, he gave them a commandment. This was their first call into his vineyard. After their fall, he mercifully promised them a Redeemer, and hired them again, as it were, into his vineyard. They, themselves, and many of their descendants, (as, for instance, Abel, Seth, and all who in the Sacred Scriptures are called children of God,) followed the call of that heavenly Master, and went into the vineyard.

About a thousand years after the creation of the world, there came to it a very evil time, so evil, in fact, that the morals of men could not have been worse than they were at that terrible epoch. God, himself, said in the bitterness of his heart, that he regretted to have made man. He decreed to destroy the vicious human race by a universal Deluge, and he put his decree into execution a hundred years later. Only Noah, a just man, together with his family, found grace before the Most High, and was destined by him to become the progenitor of a nobler and better race. God promised him that he would never again destroy man by a deluge;

cautioning him and his posterity against idolatry, and inculcating on them the duty of adoring and serving him alone. This was the second time that the master of the family went forth, to hire laborers into his vineyard about the third hour of the day.

The sixth hour, at which the Master went forth for the third time, was two thousand years after the creation of the world. He went forth when he called the patriarch, Abraham. This going forth, my brethren, this call had again become necessary, because not only did great immorality prevail among men, but idolatry was spreading more and more, and the knowledge and worship of the Creator threatened to disappear from the face of the earth. God now made Abraham the progenitor of his chosen people, and entered into a covenant with him, the sign of which was the rite of Circumcision; he, furthermore, promised him that in his seed, that is, in the Redeemer, (who according to his Humanity was to descend from him,) all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

About five hundred years later, at the ninth hour, the Master of the family went forth for the fourth time to hire laborers into his vineyard: and this was in the days of Moses, through whom God delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt,—and gave them the Written Law, which contained not only the ten commandments but, also, a multitude of ordinances for the religious and political life of the Israelites,—the design of the Most High being to separate them, as his chosen people, from all the other nations of the earth, that among them the true knowledge and worship of God and the hope of a Redeemer might be preserved.

Lastly, after another cycle of one thousand and five hundred years, at the eleventh hour, the divine Master went forth for the last time to hire laborers into his vineyard. This was the blessed time when Jesus Christ himself, God's only begotten Son, appeared upon earth, accomplished the work of Redemption, and sent his Apostles to preach the Gospel to all nations. This was the last going forth of the master of the family, wherefore, St. John says: "We know that it is the last hour." 1 John 2: 18. Thenceforth, it was not necessary for him to go forth again, because the Church then established by him, shall exist to the end of time, and shall never cease to invite all the nations of the earth to enter the vineyard of the Lord.

2. We may, also, my dear brethren, by another interpretation of the Fathers, understand the various times of the day at which the laborers were called, to mean the life of each individual person, from *his birth* to *his burial*. Those, whom the divine Master calls *early in the morning*, into his vineyard, are *the little children*. It is the will of God, that children should begin to serve him as soon as they arrive at the knowledge of him and his law. For this reason, Jesus says: "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come to me; for the kingdom of heaven is for such." Matt. 19: 14. There-

fore, the children are to be purified and sanctified by Baptism and brought into the vineyard of the Lord, into the holy Catholic Church. To this class, who are thus called early in the morning of life, most of us, dear brethren, belong: since, shortly after our birth, the majority of us had the happiness to receive the Sacrament of Baptism. Do we show ourselves grateful for this great grace, this inestimable blessing? Christian parents, be solicitous to have your children serve God in their tender age, and say to them often and earnestly: "Let nothing deprive you of your baptismal innocence."

To those whom the Master hired into his vineyard about *the third hour*, belong *the growing-up sons and daughters*. This is the fairest and most beautiful time in the life of man, and, far from being spent in levity and sin, it should be lovingly devoted to the pure service of God, according to the admonition of the Holy Ghost: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come, and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not." Eccles. 12: 1. God takes special delight in the service of innocent youth. But how small is the number of young people, who serve God! The great majority of them live in an entire forgetfulness of God and of his holy commandments. And what awaits them? Probably, a bad end. "A young man, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Prov. 22: 6.

About *the sixth hour*, the Master calls *those of mature age* into his vineyard. O, my brethren, these should follow the call of grace all the more readily, because they have already reached that age when youthful levity gives place to the earnestness of life; they should hasten to correspond to the divine inspirations in order to repair the sins of their youth; and, again, since most of them, by that time, are heads of families and rulers of Christian households, they have the additional duty imposed upon them of giving a good example to their dependents. He who reaches the age of maturity, my dear brethren, and still persists in forgetfulness of God and in disregard or contempt of his religious duties, gives little hope that he will ever be converted.

Those who are called at *the ninth hour*, are *people of declining age*. Who would believe it possible, dear friends, that there are Christians who have attained the age of sixty or seventy years, and yet are wholly indifferent to the salvation of their souls? Men and women whose feeble limbs totter as they walk, whose faces are wrinkled, and whose heads are whitened with the snows of three or four score winters, and who yet cherish a guilty conscience and decline obstinately to make provision for their dying hour! O, that these wretched old creatures would only enter into themselves, before it is too late, and employ for the sanctification and salvation of their souls, that precious grace which God so mercifully deigns to offer them! O, that they would daily say to themselves: "This feeble life of mine cannot last much longer. With the help of God and of his Angels

and Saints, I will, then, make good use of this poor remnant of a wasted existence, and, by constant prayer and penance, I will strive earnestly to make all the atonement I can for my past grievous sins." Thus, my brethren, would old age become beautiful, renewed, as it were, in the vigor of its spiritual strength by the late summer of a fervent and sincere repentance. Thus, too, would the aged penitent merit with his younger brethren, the penny of everlasting life.

But, who are they whom the Master calls into his vineyard *at the eleventh hour*, only one short hour before the close of the busy, laborious day? *Those, who are, already, actually lying on their deathbeds.* God wills none to be lost, he mercifully gives to every one of his creatures all the necessary graces for their salvation. But will they make good use of this grace? That is the question; Dysmas was saved on the cross, it is true, but his companion was lost. St. Augustine remarks, that the penitent thief has given us an example of conversion at the hour of death, to the end that no dying sinner need despair, but that there is only that *one* example vouchsafed to us, that no living or dying sinner may dare to presume. The rule is: "As a man lives, so he dies." Most rules, of course, have their exceptions, but there is none, perhaps, in which the exception is so rare as in this. Let no one, then, presume or procrastinate. Do not put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day, is a maxim of human prudence which, nevertheless, applies with still greater force to the affairs of our immortal souls. To-morrow is an uncertain day, my brethren, to-morrow you may be in the depths of eternity. God, who has given us to-day, has not promised us to-morrow. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Ps. 94: 8.

II. "And, when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first." Let us apply this text, my dear Christians, to our own individual lives, and let us here consider, *at what time, to whom, and by whom* the wages of the Gospel-workers were paid.

I. "*When evening was come.*" What evening is here typified, dear friends? It is the close of our natural lives, it is the solemn hour of death. This evening will infallibly come to us all. "It is appointed for men once to die." Hebr. 9: 27. We are dying every day, every step brings us nearer to the grave, every moment we approach closer and closer to our last end. We began to die when we were born, and we shall cease to die only when we shall cease to live. Life is but a lingering death. Let us, then, often ponder upon that solemn hour, especially every evening when we retire to rest. And as we do not know when the evening of our life shall come, do not know, even, if the night shall not settle suddenly down upon us while youth is yet at high-noon, at its golden meridian,—let us live in such a manner, that it may not find us unprepared. "Blessed is

that servant, whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing." Matt. 24: 46.

2. "*Call the laborers.*" Do you hear it? Only the laborers, not those, who stood idle in the market-place, received the stipulated wages. How miserable is the condition of idlers! Some are too lazy to provide for themselves the necessaries of life. Some, again, are very busy in the market-place of the world, gathering together dust and ashes, which constitute its riches, its honors, and its pleasures; but, since they neglect, all the while, to provide for their immortal souls, they, too, are idlers before God. Of these, it is said: "They have already received their reward." Who, in short, are the vast multitude of idlers? Those, my friends, who neglect to do good works and abuse the means of grace; those who live in mortal sin; those who perform good works with a sinister intention; and those who incur the Scriptual malediction, by doing slothfully the work of the Lord. Do you, perhaps, belong to one of these classes? Remember, you are not sure that God will ever call you again: "Because, I called, and you refused; I stretched out my hand; and there was none that regarded. You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprebussions; I, also, will laugh in your destruction; and will mock, when that shall come to you, which you feared." Prov. 1: 24-27. The delay of repentance is full of danger, and pregnant with destruction.

"*The lord of the vineyard saith to his steward.*" Who, dear Christians, is this beloved one, whom the master deputed to reward the laborers at the close of the day. The steward is Christ, for "the Father doth not judge any man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son." John 5: 22. It is just that Jesus, who is our Redeemer, should, also, be our Judge. Indeed, it is one of the wonderful expansions of God's mercy, that he who was clothed with our nature, who was "like unto ourselves in all things save sin," and who shed the last drop of his blood for our redemption, should be deputed by the Eternal Father to pass judgment upon us in the end. And, O, my dear brethren, be assured, that if we make Jesus our friend by a faithful following of his example during life, we need not fear him as our Judge, when in the evening of our days he calls us to receive our everlasting reward.

3. *Pay them their hire.* What wages did the laborers receive? *They received, every man, a penny.* By this penny of the Gospel is understood,—heaven. Not without reason, dear brethren, was heaven thus called a penny. That ancient penny of the laborers was of silver, therefore, of precious metal; hence, it was a type of the great and priceless felicity which the Saints enjoy in heaven; again, it was round, my dear brethren, and on that account, an emblem of the eternity of heavenly joys. Lastly, the penny of the laborers was stamped with the image and name of the king, and heaven shall present to us the Beatific Vision and the image of

the Eternal King, who has said: "To him, that overcometh, I will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it." Apoc. 2: 17.

Every one of the workers in the vineyard received a penny; those who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, as well as those who toiled in it from the early morning. How is this to be understood, dear brethren? In this sense, that all who die in the grace of God shall go to heaven, no matter whether they began to serve him in their childhood, or in their youth,—in their mature or their declining age. Thus, the penitent thief has found his place in heaven after his life of crime, as well as St. John, the Baptist, who from his tenderest infancy dedicated himself to the service of God. You must not conclude, however, that all the Saints enjoy the same degree of beatitude, for, it is of faith that the degree of their eternal happiness is in proportion to their merits. "As star differeth from star, so the Saints differ from each other in glory." "He, that soweth sparingly, shall, also, reap sparingly;" he, that soweth with a liberal, generous hand, shall, also, reap an overflowing harvest of celestial delights. Neither must you suppose, because he who enters the Lord's vineyard at the eleventh hour, goes to heaven as well as the one who began to labor at the third or the sixth hour, that it is all the same whether one begins to serve God early or late, for the man who, with *this* idea, would postpone his conversion to the uncertain future, would sin by presuming on God's mercy and could expect to receive for his penny, not heaven, but hell.

4. Now, my dear brethren, *how did some of the laborers act, when they received their wages?* The Gospel tells us that the first laborers, who had gone into the vineyard early in the morning, murmured, because they received no more than those, who had gone into it at the eleventh hour, that is, one short hour before the close of the day. How is this to be understood? Is there any murmuring or discontent among the Saints in heaven? Is not each of those chosen ones satisfied with his or her individual felicity? "In my Father's house," says our divine Lord, "there are many mansions;" do any of the elect, therefore, envy the superior glory or greater happiness of the dwellers in the higher mansions? Oh no, my dear brethren, in heaven there is nothing among the blessed spirits but gratitude towards God, nothing but contentment, love, and concord with each other. The dissatisfaction and murmuring of the laborers, recorded in to-day's Gospel, was not intended to symbolize the state of the Saints in heaven, but that of the Jews on earth, yes, my brethren, the Jews who expected, as the chosen people of God, to be preferred to all the other nations of the world, and, who flattered themselves that the Redeemer would come for them alone. They fancied in their pride and presumption, that they, alone, should be called to the Church and kingdom of the Messiah, and hence, they were bitterly dissatisfied when they saw that the Gentiles and the

converts from paganism, were entitled to a reward like unto themselves. No wonder, then, my dear brethren, that the master of the vineyard reproved the murmurers for their selfish dissatisfaction, explaining to them that they had no cause, whatever, for discontent, inasmuch as they had received the wages agreed upon in the first place; and that it was only their own malice which prompted them to be jealous of the gratuitous reward of others. “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will?” said he. “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” Matt. 20: 15; thus giving us to understand that their jealousy implied an infringement of his sublime prerogative, since he was privileged to do what he pleased with his own, that is, with the graces and favors he saw fit to bestow upon his creatures. This reproach, it is needless to say, applies equally as well to all who suffer themselves to be ruled by the base passion of envy.

The parable concludes with these solemn and striking words from the lips of divine Truth: “*So shall the last be first, and the first last.*” A prophecy, which was fulfilled in the Jews, who, being first called to Christianity, became the last to embrace it, because they proudly continued in their unbelief,—whereas, the Gentiles who, according to their vocation, were to be called last, became, on the contrary, the first to enter the Church, because they received the Gospel with an humble and believing heart. These words of Christ are, also, applicable to the just and to sinners; the just, because of their sanctity, are the first in the vineyard of the Lord; but sinners, because of their iniquities, are the last to enter therein. The former may, at any time, lose their justice, fall into sin, and become *the last*; the latter may yet be converted by the grace and mercy of God and so, become *the first* in the divine esteem and friendship. The just must, then, beware of building their hopes of salvation upon any false security as to their own virtues; and repentant sinners whom Satan tempts to despair, should, also, remember the consoling promises of our Lord, and dismiss all fear as to the possibility of their being saved. By saying: “Many are called, but few chosen,” Jesus enunciates the truth, that God wills all men to be saved, but that only a few correspond to the will of God and avail themselves of the means of salvation; consequently, the great majority of mankind are lost. We are all called, my dear brethren,—whether it be at the third or the sixth hour, whether it be at the ninth or the eleventh hour,—we are all most certainly called into the vineyard of the Lord, there to work out our salvation there, in fear and trembling. Let us, then, strive with all our might to do the will of our divine Master; let us live constantly in such a pious and penitential manner, that, when the evening of life closes around us, and Christ, the steward, comes to reward the laborers, if we have been among the many called, we may merit at that awful hour, to be among the chosen few, and to receive from his sacred hand the penny of everlasting life. Amen.

## SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

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THE POOR SOIL INTO WHICH THE WORD OF GOD GENERALLY FALLS.

*“When a very great multitude was gathered together, and hastened out of the cities to him, he spoke by a similitude.” Luke 8: 4.*

Our divine Saviour seems to have had a great solicitude for the inhabitants of cities, and to have taken a lively interest in their eternal welfare. Capharnaum is called, pre-eminently, *his city*, because it was there, that he often sojourned and preached the Word of God; the cities around the lake of Genesareth were successively the theatres of his wonderful works; and the country of the so-called “Ten Cities,” often witnessed the marvels of his divine, all-embracing love. Even in the Gospel of this day, we see, my dear brethren, with what zealous concern he occupied himself with those people who hastened out of the cities to attend to his discourse. Consequently, this Gospel is particularly adapted to the inhabitants of cities and especially calculated to meet their spiritual wants; nay, I really believe, that our divine Saviour chose this parable because, on that occasion, he saw so many people from the cities assembled around him. But if this be so, his words were a rebuke to his worldly hearers, rather than a testimony to them, that they were of the number of the docile and obedient hearers of the divine word,—since the parable implied that only one-fourth of the assembled souls could boast of possessing the good soil necessary for the growth of the evangelical seed, whilst in the case of the other three-fourths, it was fruitless from various causes. Does not our divine Lord further mean to inculcate this truth by the words addressed to his Apostles: “Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, going forth out of that city, shake off the dust from your feet, and flee into another”? This much is certain, dear friends, that the word of God meets with greater obstacles in cities than elsewhere, and that in cities there are more thoughtless, inconstant, hard-hearted, and sensual people, who resist the word of God, than are usually found in country-places. Let us not be deceived, therefore, as to the dispositions of those inhabitants of cities who make a practice of attending sermons. In the first place, their number is very small; and, in the second, even, if they *do* go to hear a sermon, it is, too often, alas! from curiosity, custom, or, perhaps, a worse motive, rather than from a desire to be benefited by it; so that I may justly say: The fruit of the word of God in cities is very insignificant; the fate of the Christian preacher among the people of cities is most sad and discouraging. Considering this a little closer, we shall find, my dear brethren, that the word of God falls either

- I. Upon thoughtless, or*
- II. Upon inconstant, or*
- III. Upon sensual hearts, and*
- IV. Seldom into good, susceptible souls.*

What intention have I, dear friends, in preaching this sermon? Perhaps, (you may falsely imagine,) to hurt your feelings or to put you needlessly to shame? Or, perhaps, uncharitably to expose your hidden faults? God forbid. On the contrary, I solemnly assure you, that every word I utter shall be directed, by the help of God, to your greater good and eternal benefit. I know that many of you come here, Sunday after Sunday, with the best and purest of intentions, to listen to the teaching of the Gospel; that with many of you the word of God has borne fruit a hundred fold, but I, also, know to my sorrow, that with many it has been sadly and strangely unproductive. Will I not be called to account by the divine Master, if, through my silence, I allow this blight to destroy the golden harvest of the Gospel? Ah! no, let us all do our duty. And while you, my dear friends, bear patiently and bravely my loving admonitions, I, on my part, will strive with all gentleness to secure your future attendance at sermons with such perfect dispositions, that the word of God may produce abundant fruit in your souls.

I. *“When a very great multitude was gathered together, and hastened out of the cities to him, he spoke by a similitude. A sower went out to sow his seed.”* The sense of the similitude is this: The seed is the word of God, the sower is Jesus Christ, or his lawful representative; for, even as he, himself, once announced the word of divine truth by his own holy lips, so he continues to announce it to the end of time through his Church and its consecrated ministers. Now, of this divine word it is said: *“Some fell by the wayside, and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it; . . . . these are they that hear; then, the devil cometh and taketh the word out of their heart, lest, believing, they should be saved.”*

These, my brethren, are thoughtless, frivolous people on whom a wise and prudent advice is wasted, inasmuch as it, (as the old adage says:) “goes in at one ear and out at the other.”—No sooner have they received a good lesson or admonition, whether at home or in the church, than they have forgotten it. Neither do they set much value upon such counsels, and, in fact, if they could only be spared them altogether, they would be so much the better pleased. Who can doubt but that in the time of Christ, there were many such people? The Herodians, the merry and jovial guests of the luxurious Herod, were of this class, and there were plenty of these to be found in the cities. And who could doubt that even, now-a-days, there is a multitude of such people in our modern cities, who are too thoughtless, frivolous, and light-headed, to allow the word of

God to sink deep enough into their hearts to produce its eternal fruits? I do not hesitate to declare that to this class of people belong a large proportion of our young Catholic men, of whom it is usually said: "Youth has no virtue." Their young blood does not hinder them from going to High Mass and listening to a sermon now and then, nay, even oftener than you would believe possible; but, for all that, we can justly say of them, that they are standing at the cross-roads, undecided;—one narrow path leads to eternal salvation, the other broad road, to everlasting damnation; on one hand, they look back upon the world and its false delights, —on the other, they behold the altar of God and the ever-open door of his holy Church; on the left, they are beset with the temptations of their own sensual hearts, pleading with them to indulge in unlawful pleasures, and on the right, they hear the voice of the preacher, exhorting them to self-denial, to prayer, to the sacraments. In the forenoon, these fickle souls serve God; in the afternoon, they are the slaves, alas! of the world, the flesh and the devil. Generally speaking, you will find them among the last in the congregation; they are close to the church-door, in the last pews, in order to be able to make good their escape, and get out of the damp air of the church as soon as possible. Still this is better than if they remained outside altogether, and spent their time in idle conversation, or, perhaps, in doing worse. But, O, my dear young friends, could you not make an effort to be more generous with your good God? Would you begrudge him a few thoughtful, serious hours, wholly devoted to him and his eternal truths? How, in short, can the word of God make any impression on your distracted hearts? If it is suffered to fall on the open highway, on the unprotected surface, what is more natural than that the birds of the air, viz, worldly joys, sensual enjoyments, the pleasures of the ball-room, the theatre, the saloon, and other seductive occasions, should snatch away the divine seed and devour it out of your hearts, so that it cannot possibly take root and spring up. If you wonder at the thoughtlessness, the rude and licentious ways of so many of our Catholic young men, even of those whom you occasionally see at Mass and sermons, you have here, my dear brethren, a sufficient explanation of that by no means consoling phenomenon.

II. *"And some fell upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. .... Now these are they, who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no roots, who believe for a while, and, in time of temptation, fall away."* I think, I paint these poor souls in their right colors, when I honor them with the name of good-hearted, but timid, undecided, and wavering people, to whom the proverb is applicable: "They are like the sun-dial which shows the right time as long as the sun shines." Christ emphatically says of them, that they will not persevere, but, will fall away in time of temptation. They are

animated, it is true, with a good will, and they solemnly swear that they will follow Christ the Lord, unto death. But, alas! for the inconstancy of the human heart! If they could follow Christ through flowery fields and soft, green meadows to Paradise, ah! *then*, they would remain faithful to his foot-prints,—but, when the thorns begin to come among the flowers,—when the way of the Cross leads to heaven across Mount Calvary, these effeminate Christians look back, and find it no longer comfortable on this rugged road. They forget all their good resolutions and protestations; their incipient courage oozes out of their finger-ends, and, throwing aside the cross they had begun to carry, they allow their Lord to pursue his sorrowful journey alone. Who could doubt that there were many such cowards at the time of Christ? The Gospel makes mention of Nicodemus, who, in his timidity, came to Christ at night, in order that he might not be seen by men and be talked of as one of the Master's disciples. There is many a Nicodemus among us, now-a-days, dear friends, many a one who would cheerfully adhere to Christ if it could be done without suffering or censure, but who immediately withdraw themselves from him, whenever his service entails upon them any personal inconvenience or trifling sacrifice.—There, again, for example, was Peter, before the power of the Holy Ghost strengthened his timid heart, who swore by all that was sacred, that he was willing to suffer and die with Christ sooner than forsake him; and yet, in the hour of trial, he grew so weak and cowardly, that he swore another sort of oath,—strongly asseverating, that he did not even know the Man of Sorrows. Need I repeat to you, dear brethren, that, in these our own times,—and especially in our great cities, where temptations to fear are greater and more numerous,—there are people who are too timid, too irresolute, too unstable, to live according to the word of God which they have heard, being deterred from the practice of its maxims by a miserable and most fatal human respect? I do not deceive myself when I say, that to this class of Christians belong, especially, persons of mature age who have arrived at the meridian of life, who might be considered to have come to ripe years of discretion, to firmness of will, and to thorough self-knowledge; who, disabused of all the false illusions of youth, should know what they are about, and should realize the vital importance of the great affair of salvation. It is true, as a rule, they are the most zealous frequenters of churches, they constantly attend at sermons and receive the word of God with joy; to all appearances, it makes an excellent impression upon them; they are often moved to tears, they form good resolutions, and at such moments, express their willingness to do and suffer everything for God and his holy Church; like St. Peter, they are ready and eager to die with Christ if their sacrifice could only be accepted at once, without delay. But, oh, this spiritual excitement lasts but a few moments; it is transient, it is only a fire kindled and fed with straw;—when the time comes for decisive action, for the execution of their resolutions, for giving

solid proofs of their courage; when the time comes for confessing Christ, not secretly, but openly, for suffering something for his holy name, viz: a little contempt, a little mockery, or ridicule; when the time comes for the patient endurance of real sufferings and substantial tribulations, ah! then, my dear brethren, the word of God, the seed of the divine Sower, is already dead within their souls, and they show themselves, once more, as timid, as undecided, as weak, and as impatient as they were in the beginning of their spiritual life, thereby clearly manifesting that the word of God has produced no fruit in the rocky soil of their hearts. If you wonder, why in our days there are so many lukewarm Christians, so many nominal Catholics, who honor God with their lips, while their hearts are far from him, you have here, my dear friends, a sufficient explanation of this other by no means consoling phenomenon.

*III. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it. .... And these are they who have heard, and, going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit.* Most justly are such unhappy hearers of the Gospel denominated as moneyed men and good livers, since they find no greater pleasure than, according to the manner of gophers, to root in the perishable dust of earthly riches, or, according to the manner of unclean beasts, to wallow in the mire of sensual lust. Of these is it said by the Inspired Writer, that "their belly is their God," inasmuch as "where their treasure is, there, also, is their heart." Christ, furthermore, makes this severe remark bearing upon the subject: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into heaven;" and the Apostle of the Gentiles, also, declares that "the covetous and adulterers shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." There existed, without doubt, a vast multitude of such worldlings at the time of Christ. The Pharisees, who delighted in the possession of great riches, were of this class; as were, also, the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and who, therefore, inculcated upon their followers the human prudence of making as much as possible of their luxurious and effeminate lives, here below. I may, also, mention in this connection, the young man of the Gospel who came to Christ, seeking a rule of higher sanctity than he possessed, but whom the love of money and the spirit of the world, kept from embracing the way of holy poverty and perfection which the divine Master pointed out to him. Who could doubt that, also, in our days—and especially in our great cities, those vast centers whither the streams of gold unceasing ebb and flow, creating and supplying the continual demands of an artificial and luxurious life,—who could doubt but what we may always find at those fountain-heads of folly, myriads of people who are so much in love with riches and so consumed with the raging fires of immoral desires, that the word of God falls upon thorny ground and cannot yield

even a medium harvest of divine fruit. These men frequent sermons but seldom, and if, by chance, they *do* go once in a while to listen to the exhortations of their pastors, the celestial seed of the Gospel will surely fall among thorns and be choked by the cares and the riches and the pleasures of their lives. In the first place, they are utterly lacking in a true conception of the dignity and sanctity of the word of God. According to their notion, it amounts to no more than the rantings of a popular actor, or the persuasive speech of a wily politician; and in the second place, they are accustomed to look upon a priest as an ordinary man, stripped of a divine vocation and office. That he is the minister and representative of Christ, that he preaches not the word of man, but the word of the Triune God, that he stands before them, anointed and commissioned by God, for the purpose of making known to men the will of the Most High, all this never enters into their groveling minds; and they seem to think, that the priest may congratulate himself, if, by the fire of his eloquence and the grace of his gestures, he gains their applause, or, if, on the other hand, by his strong and decisive utterances, he does not expose himself to their vituperation and hatred. Considering all these things, the preacher of Christ might easily be tempted to lose all courage, and in the bitterness of his heart to mournfully exclaim: "After all, it is true; the power of the word of God is broken, it has lost its force, it is forever falling without fruit upon thoughtless, wavering, or effeminate hearts." Great God, must we, then, preach thy divine and everlasting truths in vain? Are there to be found no more any faithful adherents of thy Gospel? Is the spiritual soil on every side of us, entirely worthless?—Is every grain of the evangelical seed to be eternally lost?

IV. No, my dear brethren, all is not lost. Listen, again, to the words of Christ: "*And some fell upon good ground and sprung up and yielded fruit a hundredfold, . . . . and THESE are they, who, in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.*" Truly, this is the consolation of the priest of God; and, as there are in cities, (as well as in the country,) many thoughtless, hard, and sensual hearts, in which the divine seed can take no root, so, also, there are there, many susceptible hearts which not only love to hear the word of God, but meditate upon it, and practice it when the time for action comes, and regulate, in short, their whole lives according to its precepts. These are those good Christians, who, not from curiosity, not from mere habit and custom, but from a holy desire after imperishable goods and graces, a longing of the heart for greater knowledge of God, for closer union with him, for a purer perfection in his service, are drawn continually to the hearing of the word of God. Good and holy souls,—they are convinced that there is here no question of human opinions, but of the utterance of eternal truth; they look not to the exterior, but to the interior, not to the

shell, out to the kernel, not to the vessel, but to the food. Obedient to the divine inspirations, docile to the voice of grace, before, during, and after the sermon, these faithful Christians pay the greatest attention to the preparation, application, and direction of their will; and in them, as a consequence, the word of God bears fruit in a most agreeable and consoling manner. It manifests itself in an entire renewal of their spiritual being, in a will devoted to what is good and true, in actions consecrated to duty, in a heart aspiring to heaven, in a confidence which knows nothing of fear and remorseful anguish; in time of sufferings and tribulations, it manifests itself by a power to stand firm in all vicissitudes and struggles, without being confounded by its enemies; it manifests itself in the possession of a deep, interior felicity which puts to shame the false delights of the world,—in a peace of heart to be found in Christ, alone, a foretaste of the celestial peace which ever remains to the chosen children of God.

O, that *your* hearts, my dear brethren, were thus happily susceptible of the reception and retention of this divine, thrice-blessed seed! O, that you all could cry out with truth: “Yes, the power of the word of God has been proven in us! We have become new creatures in Christ, our wills are directed only to our sanctification, our lives are like crystal streams hastening only to heaven! No suffering shall deprive us of the confidence that all things work together for good unto them that love God, and, neither hunger, nor nakedness, nor cold, nor sword, nor death, can ever again separate us from the love of Christ!” If you cannot, as yet, my dear brethren, say this of yourselves, because the word of God has not, so far, found in your hearts its soft, susceptible soil, O, begin now, at least, to open and prepare those hearts to receive and to retain it; begin this day, this very hour, to put off your thoughtlessness, to overcome your inconstancy, to detest and abhor all luxury and effeminacy. Illustrate the Gospel-precepts in your own households, dear friends, by word and example; exert yourselves zealously to the end, that the holy and immortal word of God may be received by all entrusted to your charge, that all hearts may be opened to its divine influence; and, thus, you and yours will present to the harvest of the celestial Husbandman, a glorious, blooming field, yielding fruit a thirty, a sixty, or, even (God grant it!) a hundredfold for the great day of eternity. Amen.

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## SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

## THE WORD OF GOD.

*“The seed is the word of God.” Luke 8: 11.*

In the ordinary cultivation of fields and farm-lands, my brethren, nearly all the seed which is sown by the hand of the husbandman, falls upon good, well prepared ground; very little of it, as a rule, finds its way among thorns, or is lost upon rocks, or on the open highway. It is not so, alas! with the seed which the Church sows by the mouth of her ministers; most of it falls by the wayside, is choked among thorns, or withered upon rocks, so that only a small proportion of it really falls upon good ground. Whence this strange anomaly, dear friends? It is the nature of fire to burn, why, then, does not the fire of the divine word, when once kindled, continue to burn in the hearts of men? The wound caused by the sword, remains long unhealed, and even when healed, leaves an indelible scar behind it;—why, then, is the wound inflicted by the two-edged sword of the divine word so quickly healed? Iron and steel can cleave the hardest rocks in twain,—yet, why does the word of God, which according to the Apostle penetrates marrow and bone, leave no trace of its presence behind? Surely, it cannot be the fault of the seed; surely, the fire and the sword of the divine word are not to blame;—it is, and must be, the fault of the soil, which is so covered with thorns that the seed can take no root in it,—the fault of the heart which is so stony, that iron, fire, and sword cannot penetrate it. To such hard hearts, God preaches another sort of sermon; he speaks to them in tones of thunder; by the road of severe chastisements, by the stroke of terrible humiliations, it may be, he, mercifully, leads them to clear away the thorns, and blast the rocky crust. Will you, also, wait, my dear Christians, till God stretches out his punishing hand, till he forces you to return to him by bitter afflictions? Are the gentle inspirations of his grace, the terrific threats of his wrath, not sufficient to make you return to your duty? Must we not humbly confess that the seed of God’s word has often failed to find proper soil in our miserable hearts? God is continually sowing good seed, but where are the barns which we have filled with the fruit thereof? Alas! with hearts in which the seed of the word of God has perished, with barren fields, with hands empty of good works, many of us stand, this hour, before God. We go frequently to church, it is true, but our ears are open only to the sound and not to the substance of the divine word; what is still more deplorable, the trumpet of God’s judgment, ringing in the preacher’s denunciations, serves only, at times, to lull us fast

asleep. Thus, the word of God, which is intended to arouse the sinner from his fatal slumber, becomes subservient through his own fault, to the slothfulness of his criminal flesh. The same word to which, at present, we listen so carelessly, shall, one day, my brethren, rouse us from our graves with the awful sound of the last trumpet. To the end that it may *then* awake us to glory, let it now arouse us and penetrate our hearts, and let us, therefore, meditate, to-day, on this important subject, and consider attentively:

- I. The duty of the preacher of the word of God, and*
- II. The duty of the hearer of the word of God.*

I. In those solemn moments which intervened between his resurrection from the dead and his glorious ascension into heaven, our Blessed Lord expressly enjoined on his Apostles the propagation of his kingdom in these words: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." Matt. 28: 19. In what manner he wished to have his doctrine announced to all nations, we learn from the words of St. Paul to Timothy: "I charge thee, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by his coming, and his kingdom: preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and doctrine." 2. Tim. 4: 1, 2. St. Paul places Timothy, as it were, before the judgment-seat of God and adjures him by the Judge of the living and the dead, to preach the word of God at all times, both in season and out of season; and this commission and charge concern all in whose hands the Church has placed for distribution among her children, the sacred seed of the word of God. In the Old Law, the prophets, too, were commanded to announce the word of God. Ezechiel trembled while the Lord addressed to him these words: "If, when I say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die; thou declare it not to him, nor speak *to* him, that he may be converted from his wicked way, and live; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but I will require his blood at thy hand." Ezech. 3: 18. As the blood, (or the souls), of the wicked, was demanded at the hands of the prophets in the Old Law, in which nothing was announced but the terrific thunder on Mount Sinai, the heavy and oppressive yoke of the Law and the awful omnipotence of him who was, is, and will be,—how much more will the blood of the wicked be demanded at the hands of the priests of the New Law, who are commissioned to announce the gladdest of tidings, namely: Grace, liberty from the burden of the Law, redemption, peace, hope, and salvation? *The souls of the wicked will be required at the hands of the priests.* I tremble when I think of this terrible responsibility, for I see, on all sides of me, so many unhappy ones who have abandoned the way of the Lord, so many faithless Christians who are forgetful of their duties to God, to their neighbors, and to themselves, so many who live in open violation of the divine and eccles-

iaistical law. Alas! their blood, their souls, will be demanded at my hands, if I fail to warn them of the danger they are in, if I neglect to exhort them to be converted from their evil ways. Will you not, then, O sinners! have pity on *my* soul as well as on *your* own? Will I not, perhaps, after having preached to others, myself become a castaway?

God will require the souls of the wicked at the hands of the priest, if he do not preach the divine word to them, if he do not caution them against their spiritual dangers, if he do not reprove, entreat, and rebuke sinners with all patience and doctrine, if he do not denounce their multiplied crimes and iniquities. Hear, then, and understand, O my beloved people,—the minister of God must preach without respect to persons, he must preach rigorously, fearlessly, and frequently. God requires your souls at his hands. Do not complain if his word, sometimes, is a sword with which he cuts down the thorns of useless cares, a sharp knife with which he strives to prune off your pernicious enjoyments and enervating pleasures; do not rebelliously murmur if the word of God, like a plow, loosens the frozen soil of your souls; if it comes like a clap of thunder or a flash of lightning to rend with violence the rocky crust of your hearts, that the blessed seed of God may take root in them; do not cry out with bitter words of reproach, if the two-edged sword of the Gospel wounds your heart in order to heal it,—for, the anointed priest of the Most High is commanded to preach the word of God “in season, out of season, to reprove, to entreat, and to rebuke with all patience and doctrine,” and he is assured that the time is at hand when the unhappy children of this world will no longer attend to the sound doctrine of Christ. Do not, then, complain, my dear brethren, when from this holy place he speaks the truth which is always bitter and unpleasant, for God will, one day, require your immortal souls at his hand. With untiring zeal, let him go on unmolested in his divine office as sower of the seed of the word of God; whether it fall by the wayside, whether it be choked among thorns, or lost upon the rocks, he is not responsible for its failure, his duty is to perseveringly sow the seed. If you are deaf to the word of God, if you harden your hearts against its teachings, God will require and demand your souls at your own hands. That this may not happen, that you may co-operate in the salvation of your own precious souls, I shall explain to you, to-day, the duty of him who hears the holy word of God.

II. If you desire, my dear Christians, to derive real profit from the sermons and religious instructions which you hear from time to time, you must listen to them *with attention* and with *a good intention*, not in a spirit of curiosity, attending only to the style and language, the graceful gestures, the originality or fanciful turn of the speaker’s thoughts, or his elegant manner of delivery, but viewing him, rather, as the mouth-piece of the Most High, hearken to his utterances with singular gravity and reverence.

Attend simply to the substance of the discourse; pay attention to the matter, rather than to the manner, and, then, the sermons you hear will refresh and strengthen your soul. As hunger, or a good appetite, is a sure sign of corporal health, so a longing desire to hear the word of God is an infallible sign of a healthy condition of the soul. If you neither hunger nor thirst for the word of God, nor find any relish in it, it is a sure sign that your soul is sick and in a dangerous condition, since it loathes the food which is its only true nourishment.

The instructions and admonitions of God's minister you must receive as addressed particularly to yourselves, and to the needs of your own souls; you must not apply them, as many do, to the souls and short-comings of others. There are those who resemble caterers at rich men's tables, whose business it is to help others to food, without taking any themselves. Hearing the priest of God announce from the pulpit some wholesome truth, or fulminate from the altar some salutary denunciation, how often do you say to yourselves, with a self-complacent smile: "An excellent reflection, indeed, and very proper for such a one. This, again, is very applicable to one of my acquaintances; if such a one were here to-day, how it would suit him or her!" "O, did he not give it to him or to her to-day!" cries another. "Hadn't she to hear the truth this morning? Oh, I was ever so glad of it; I declare, it was capital!" And, notwithstanding all this catering, my good friends, you keep nothing of the feast for yourselves. Please, take a slice of this Gospel-bread for yourselves; it suits you, I can assure you, as well as it suits your poor friend, and, perhaps, a great deal better. This piece of salutary counsel was intended for you, and not for another for whom you do the carving. At the banquet of the word of God, I would have all of you to be guests and not caterers; for, believe me, in spite of all your presumption and self-sufficiency, you neither carve nor cater according to the will of God. I would have you listen to the divine word of the Gospel with an humble and believing heart. Alas! many hear the truths of salvation and fail to profit by them, because they thus apply the preacher's words to their neighbors' wants, rather than to their own miseries. If the speaker presents a picture of vice in all its heinousness, if he describes its dreadful consequences and its miserable end, such a caterer is at once ready to carry the dish to some unfortunate friend or acquaintance, reflecting in his pharasaical pride: "Ah, *this* is for such a one." If the priest speak on covetousness the proud man says: "Thanks be to God, *I* am not covetous," not reflecting that pride is a mortal sin, as well as avarice. If he speak against impurity, the glutton says: "Thanks be to God, *I* am not unchaste or immodest!" forgetting at the same time, that gluttons, as well as fornicators and adulterers, will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

The good Christian does not hear the word of God in such an unsatisfactory manner. In the humility of his heart, he knows and acknowledges

himself to be a sinner, and, although he be not conscious of having committed that special sin which is denounced from the pulpit, he knows that he is guilty of many other sins, and that it is only the grace of God which preserves him from that especial vice. Hence, whatever is said of the sin in question of which he is not guilty, he applies to those sins of which he really knows himself to be guilty, and, thus, he profits from hearing the word of God. All that a prudent man hears, all good and profitable counsel, he will practice and apply to himself, but a vain and self-sufficient man will listen with disgust to the same wholesome truths, and end by casting them scornfully behind his back. Be of the number of those wise men who apply what they hear to themselves, as if it had been intended for their individual souls, alone; for, perhaps, that which might be deemed applicable to another, may be better applied to one's self; and, if you knew yourself better than you do, my dear brethren, you would not be so quick to perceive the mote in your neighbor's eye, whilst you do not observe the beam in your own. Even though there should be nothing in the preacher's discourse which, in any way, touches or concerns you at present, neglect not to hoard it up in your heart for future use. Perhaps, you may, one day, need it; and, hence, you should take his holy advice as if addressed directly to yourself, alone. At the same time, you must not be so foolish as to think that the speaker designs to single you out as a target for his denunciatory arrows; such a thought must never enter your minds, but in all humility, you should compare your life and actions with the doctrine he preaches, and examine yourselves in the mirror of the Gospel, to ascertain clearly, what you are and what you ought to be. Consider, in fine, my dear Christians, how far you are yet distant from the perfection proposed for your practice, and say to yourself: "Indeed, what he preaches suits me very well; I have great need of this warning; heaven be praised, it is God, who has put this counsel into his mouth for the everlasting good of my soul!"

Again, we must be firmly convinced that the word of God is our true spiritual food and nourishment, the manna of the elect, a portion of which we should endeavor to carry home with us from every sermon and lay up in the ark of our hearts. The seed which fell upon good ground, says our Lord, signifies those who hear the word of God with a heart well disposed, those who retain it and make it bring forth fruit in due season. The body is in a very bad state of health when the stomach rejects all food and retains no nourishment. In like manner, the soul is in a dangerous condition when the heart does not retain the word of God. For this reason, the royal prophet says: "Lord, I have hidden thy words in the bottom of my heart, that I may not sin against thee." Os. 118: 11. In effect, how often does it not happen that being tempted to sin and in danger of yielding to the temptation, we recall some of the awful effects of sin, or some holy maxim

heard in a sermon, and immediately gather new strength and courage from those powerful aids.

We may easily understand, therefore, my dear brethren, that those who go to sermons for fashion's sake, or the gratification of their curiosity, as, also, those who suffer themselves to be overcome by sleep or distractions during the sermon,—act foolishly and imprudently, and far from benefiting their souls, only incur fresh guilt. The devil comes and snatches the word out of their heart, lest, believing, they should be saved. And thus is verified the parable of the grain which was devoured by the birds of the air, as soon as it was sown. Perhaps, one single word which you lost by your sleep or your distractions, would have contributed very much to your spiritual advancement; and this is why the devil, who nourishes a mortal hatred and envy against you, has striven by his wiles and his temptations to prevent the good seed from taking root in your heart. St. Augustine compares the word of God to a fish-hook which never takes unless it is taken, and as the fish remains a prize to the hook, so we remain a prize to the word of God, if we take and receive it into our hearts.

Endeavor, then, my dear brethren, to go to sermons with such excellent dispositions, to hear the word of God in such an efficacious manner, that it may take root in your hearts and yield abundant fruit. Practice, says St. James, what you hear: “Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For, if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer; he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a glass. For, he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was.” St. James 1: 23.24. Those who hear the divine law are not just before God; but those who do it, shall be justified. Let the warning of the Most High be constantly before your eyes, my dear Christians, and let these consoling words of divine promise ever sound like a silver trumpet in the ears of every individual now within hearing of my voice: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.” (Apoc. 2: 10.) Amen.

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### QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

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THE HOUR IN WHICH THE SINNER'S EYES WILL BE OPENED.

“*A certain blind man sat by the way-side, begging.*” Luke 18: 35.

We seldom hear, my dear brethren, of a blind man's receiving his eyesight, and, perhaps, no one has ever heard, that a man who was born blind, received the use of his eyes at the hour of death; on the contrary,

experience teaches that those who through life enjoyed good eye-sight, lose it shortly before the moment of dissolution. While they may, sometimes, retain possession of the other senses of the body and faculties of the soul, dying persons, as a rule, are unable to see at the last, and can only distinguish one person from the other by the tones of the voice. We often hear those who are sick unto death, exclaim: "My eyes grow dim." But it is quite the reverse, my dear Christians, with impenitent sinners. During life they are blind but, before they die, the scales fall from their eyes, not, alas! for their consolation, but to their utter confusion. I am sure, that the blind man healed by Christ, never had a greater pleasure than when, for the first time in his life, he saw the light of day and beheld this beautiful world and all the novel charm of its visible objects around him. In an ecstasy of joy, he followed Jesus, glorifying God. This is not the case with the sinner who has been blind during life, and who, on his death-bed, opens his eyes for the first time to the true Light. He will, then, behold what he never saw before; he will see in a new light three awful things, the sight of which will fill him with fear and consternation; namely: the world, his soul, and his sins.

- I. In the world he will see nothing but vanity,*
- II. In his soul he will behold nothing but the greatest poverty, and*
- III. In his sins he will discover naught save the greatness of the insult they have offered to God.*

I. In his dying hour, the sinner will see the vanity of that world which during life he worshipped. The day of death is a day of darkness to the eyes of the body, because they can no longer see the objects by which they were once falsely enchanted; but it will be a day of light to the eyes of the soul, because they shall then see the vanity of the base idol, to which they have so long offered incense. When the body of the sinner, at the approach of death, sinks in to that sleep, out of which only the trumpet of the Lord shall rouse it on the day of judgment,—then, the soul which, until that time, quietly and securely reposed amidst the vanities of the world, shall awake and open its eyes to its own utter dismay. O, that I had eloquence enough to describe to you, dear brethren, the miserable form in which the world appears to its dying votary? Allow me to use the words of those who have experienced it: "We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways; but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us; or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on, and as a ship that passeth through the waves; whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found, nor the path of its keel in the waters: or, as when a bird that flieth through the air: of the passage of which no mark can be found. Or, as when an

arrow is shot at a mark, the divided air presently cometh together again, so that the passage thereof is not known. So we also being born, forthwith ceased to be; and have been able to shew no mark of virtue; but are consumed in our wickedness." Wisd. 5: 7-13. Thus, dying worldlings speak of the world, because in that hour they are convinced of its nothingness and of the hollowness of its promises. "O vanity of vanities, all is vanity and affliction of spirit, besides loving God and serving him alone!"

II. The sinner, in his dying hour, will behold, probably for the first time, the utter poverty of his soul. Looking back upon his past life, he is forced to say with those sinners mentioned above: "We are able to shew no mark of virtue." He will see his youth spent in idleness and folly, in gluttony and rioting, but he will not be able to show any mark of virtue. He will see the years of his manhood sacrificed to the love of money, to sensual vices, perhaps, to ambition and selfishness. He will see the last years of his life spent in spiritual sloth and tepidity, and defiled with the sins of his youth and manhood, but he will be able to show no mark of virtue. The churches in which he prayed without devotion, and the holy Sacraments which he so often abused and profaned, will present themselves, like an awful vision, before him. He will remember the sermons he listened to without fruit, the prayers he said distractedly and without reverence, the inspirations of grace which he resisted, the instructions and exhortations to which he was deaf, in fine, the manifold graces, favors, and blessings from above, to which he proved himself ungrateful. He will say: "On such a day God called me, but I was deaf to his call. In that month of the Jubilee he received me most graciously; on that festival of Christmas, of Easter, of Pentecost, he welcomed me with tender love to the Sacraments,—but, ungrateful wretch that I was, I turned my back upon him again, just after that loving reception. . . . In such a year, God warned me by a severe sickness to turn from my evil ways and be converted to him, but of all the good resolutions then made under the pressure of fear and pain, I did not put one into practice!" I assure you, my dear brethren, that words are wanting adequately to describe the shame and confusion with which the dying sinner shall be covered at the sight of the poverty of his soul. Being deprived of the goods of this world, which he is now forced to leave behind him, and of the goods of the soul which he neglected and despised in the days of his health and strength,—must not his remorse and despair at that awful hour be extreme? There is nothing within or without him, that can afford him consolation. He will wish to have done what his baptismal vows required of him, but it will be too late. He will yearn with unspeakable desire to accomplish some good while life yet remains to him, but his approaching dissolution declares to him in unmistakable words, that time is now no more.

But what will increase the sinner's terror, is the knowledge, that in a few hours, perhaps moments, he must stand before the judgment-seat of God. When Adam, after the transgression of the divine command, heard the voice of God, which summoned him into his presence, he hid himself amid the trees of Paradise, being ashamed to appear before God, stripped of his original justice and innocence. "I was afraid," he said, "because I was naked." The terror of the dying sinner will be still greater, for, Adam, guilty as he was, appeared as a penitent before God, his Father, who wished to correct and save him, but the dying sinner will appear impenitent before God, his judge, who must punish him for his manifold crimes and iniquities. He would rather be buried beneath the weight of the hills and mountains, than behold, face to face, his outraged Redeemer, since, in the nakedness and poverty of his soul, he sees only too plainly his own miserable guilt, a guilt which admits of no mitigation or excuse. For, who compelled him to cast away the white garment of innocence, with which he had been clothed at his baptism? Who compelled him to despise and lose the grace of God which he had recovered in the Sacrament of Penance? He may have succeeded in every thing else, but he failed in the salvation of his soul. What plea can he urge in his own defence? What argument can he make use of to extenuate his malice?

Hear, dear Christians, how St. Ephrem (meditating on the parable of the five foolish virgins) expresses the despair of those souls, who approach death without the necessary provision of good works: "We would not buy oil, when we had both time and means to do it. We could have made provision, but did not; we had time, but made bad use of it; we had plenty of opportunities, but did not embrace them. We seek them now, but cannot find them. Our poverty confounds us, but there are no means, no hope left to us to remedy it. Nothing remains for us but to say farewell to that blessed country for which we were created, and into which nothing can enter that is defiled or unadorned with virtues. We have been weighed in the balance, and found wanting. We are in a deplorable state, without virtues, without good works, without merits, and, therefore, we shall be without heaven, without God, and in misery, forever!"

God forbid that any of us, my dear brethren, should end our lives thus unprovided. But, let us not deceive ourselves now, whilst we are in health and strength and the full possession of our faculties. Let us inquire, while the time of mercy lasts, what provision of good works we have made for our last journey: with what fervor we have served God up to the present hour; let us ask ourselves, how we love our neighbor, how we fulfil the duties of our respective states of life; and if any one, having carefully examined the records of the past, shall find his soul devoid of virtues,—poor and naked in the sight of God,—let him, at once, arm himself with courage, and say: "I will return this day, to virtue, to duty; I will arise and go to my Father, and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against

heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son, but take me as one of thy hired servants,’,” and as the father, mentioned in the Gospel, embraced his son who was lost and found again, so our heavenly Father will, also, mercifully receive the repenting sinner, if he return with an humble and contrite heart, and the Angels in heaven will rejoice at his conversion.

III. The sinner, on his death-bed, will see the malice of his sins by which he insulted God. Overwhelmed with terror and confusion, he will say: “Woe to me, what a sight! What heinous sins and shameless vices!” He would gladly turn his eyes upon other objects, but he cannot; on all sides, he is surrounded by sins which make him cry out, full of consternation: “My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me.” Ps. 37: 5. It must, indeed, be a horrible sight, to behold at one glance, not only all the sins which one has committed from his infancy to his dying hour, but, also, the abominable, infinite malice of them. St. Bernard says: “All his iniquities will be present to the eyes of the wicked man; he will see the number, the magnitude, the enormity, and the ingratitude of his sins.” Ah! the greatness of sin is seldom considered in this world. Self-love blinds us, the tumult of the passions and the mephitic maxims of the world cloud our judgments and darken our understandings,—but death will work a change. In that solemn hour, all darkness will vanish and the sinner will behold in the clearest light the magnitude and turpitude of his sins, and the black ingratitude he has been guilty of towards his Creator. He will behold a *God of infinite glory*, whom he has mocked and despised; a *God of infinite liberality*, to whom he has returned evil for good; a *God of infinite perfection*, before whom he has insolently preferred the meanest of creatures; a *God of infinite goodness*, whom he has not loved, but offended; a *God of infinite justice*, the arrows of whose vengeance he has not feared, but provoked. How can words express the confusion with which he shall be covered in that moment of anguish and retributive remorse! Then, will he entertain quite a different opinion of those sins which, at present, he commits without fear. O, what a vast difference there is, my dear brethren, between a living and a dying sinner! When Esau, (to satisfy his appetite,) sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage, he showed no immediate remorse for that imprudent transaction. As the Scripture says, he went away, making little account of having sold his birthright; but, afterwards, my dear friends, ah! afterwards, when he came to himself and learned that Jacob had really received from his father the privileges of the first-born son, he roared out with a great cry, and could not be comforted for the sad result of his folly. This is the image of the sinner as considered, first, in the act of sinning and, secondly, at the hour of death. When he sins, he is so full of his greed, of his sensual satisfactions, that he is quite

indifferent to the insult he offers to God; he goes the way of the wicked, making no account of his sin,—but, when the awful hour of death approaches, he will discover his mistake, and, beholding the abomination of his infidelities, he will roar with a loud cry and gnash his teeth in anticipation of the judgment and the condemnation shortly to follow. Sinners, the day will sooner or later arrive, on which, after the storm of your passions has subsided, after you have realized the malice of your sins, and the priceless value of the birthright which you have surrendered for something even more despicable than a mess of pottage,—you, in your turn, will roar with a loud cry of despair, and, (as the Holy Ghost assures us,) be seized with a terrible fear of what is yet to come.

Such is the miserable state of the dying sinner. We know this to be true, my dear brethren, we believe it, and, yet, alas! we laugh, we are merry, we eat, and drink, and sleep in sin. O, the blindness and infatuation of man! I beseech you, now, at least, to open your eyes, that you may see in time the imminent danger you are in, and take measures to avert it. Do not wait till death strips the fatal scales from your eyes, and discloses to you the frightful spectacle of your sins. Look at them now with a sorrowful sense of their enormity, and repent whilst a favorable ray of mercy and grace shines upon you, inviting you to repentance. Wait not till your last hour draws near, for then, the sight of your sins will only increase your misery and drive you to despair. Whilst the day of salvation lasts, let us, one and all, cry out to God with the royal prophet: “Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For, I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.” (Ps. 50: 4.5.) Amen.

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### QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

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#### ON THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY.

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 1. Cor. 13: 1.*

Thus St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, speaks of the sublime virtue of Charity, that theological virtue infused into our souls at our baptism, whereby we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. What more forcible language could the holy Apostle use, my dear brethren, in order to make us sensible of the necessity and excellency of that virtue! And, yet, how few are they who reflect seriously upon this point! How few are they who ask themselves whether they can hope that their souls are adorned with that holy gift, without which it is impossible to please God, or perform any act meritorious for

heaven; without which no moral virtue can exist in the soul; without which neither faith, nor hope, will profit any thing for life everlasting! I trust, however, my dear Christians, that you, at least, belong to the chosen few who know how to appreciate this precious virtue which holy Baptism has infused into your souls; and if you have ever had the misfortune to lose the treasure of divine Charity by mortal sin, that, by humble penance and fervent prayer, you have blotted out that deadly stain from your soul and moved a merciful God by your sincere contrition, to restore you again to his holy grace and friendship. In order, however, to inspire you more and more with a true and earnest desire to preserve that sublime virtue, I will say a few words to you, to-day, my dear brethren,

*I. On the necessity, and  
II. On the excellency of Charity, or divine Love.*

I. To understand and be convinced that Charity is absolutely necessary to salvation, we need no other proof, than what St. Paul gives us in the Epistle of to-day. Listen to his words, hear him, as it were, dilate upon the characteristics of this sovereign virtue. Without charity, (as the holy Apostle declares,) all other virtues, acquirements, or perfections, are of no avail; even the most extraordinary gifts, the most arduous works, become useless and profitless to us without it. To speak the language of the angels, to be gifted with the knowledge of hidden and future things, to penetrate and understand the most incomprehensible truths, to possess unlimited wisdom and science,—all these things, without the virtue of charity, without the grace of God in our souls, profit us nothing. To have the faith of a St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, so as even to remove mountains; to give all one possesses to the poor, to deliver one's body to the torturers, even to the glowing stake or the excruciating rack of the martyrs,—are, in truth, things extraordinary and to be admired, says the holy Doctor, St. Augustine; yet, how great and marvelous, soever, they may be or may appear to be before man, should I possess or accomplish them all, exclaims the Apostle, who had been taken up into the third heavens, “if I have not charity, I am nothing.” (St. Aug. Serm. 50 *De Verbo Dom.*) The same holy father continues (*ibid.*): “Understand how necessary this virtue is, since, if we suffer the most cruel torments, if we perform the most heroic acts of patience, all will profit us nothing, if we have not charity.” Of what benefit have been to so many sinners those great gifts which they abused? What has it profited Solomon to have possessed such unparalleled wisdom and knowledge that he was deservedly regarded by the whole world with the greatest admiration, and is yet known by the exalted title of “the Wise Man”? What benefit has Tertullian derived from that profound learning which enabled him with such force of eloquence to defend our holy faith against the pagan Emperors, and to confound the heretics by

triumphantly demonstrating the truth of our holy religion? What benefit, indeed, when he was afterwards so unfortunate as to sever himself from that church which, alone, is one, holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, the infallible Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the pillar and the ground of Truth"? And, my beloved Christians, at the present day, pray, what does it profit those learned men outside the pale of the Church, to have a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures which they read incessantly, of the foreign languages which they have studied so carefully,—what, I repeat, does it all profit them, so long as they are without the necessary and sublime virtue of charity, which is found only in the Church of Jesus Christ, as St. Augustine solemnly affirms? What will it profit *us*, my brethren, to labor and study, to toil and suffer with zeal and patience, if we have not charity, if we do not sincerely love God? The Apostle of the Gentiles tells us: "It profiteth us nothing." Why, then, should we be so anxious to have our names, our talents, our supposed good works, extolled by the world, when, thus, perhaps, we endanger that virtue so essential for our eternal happiness? What are all the grandeur and learning of this world, what are all its riches and renown, without charity? "Like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." A simple and illiterate child who can neither read nor write, but who knows how to love God, possesses far more knowledge than the most learned Doctors and Theologians whose souls are devoid of that virtue of charity; and it is far more pleasing to the eyes of God, than those who by their learning astonish the world, but have not that queen virtue of charity, says St. Augustine. (Lib. 3. de D. C. 10.) The holy Doctor continues: "With charity all our works become good and profitable for heaven; take away charity, and we labor in vain. He, who loves God above all things, not in word, but in truth, whose actions show that the holy virtue of charity is in his soul,—possesses and virtually understands both what is clear and what is hidden in God's sacred word." (*Ibid.*) How much, then, my dear brethren, are they to be pitied, who spend their time in the pursuit of worldly and, often, dangerous knowledge to the great detriment of charity, without which there neither is, nor can be, true happiness, here or hereafter! I trust, however, as I have said before, that you are not of that number, but that, being well aware of the necessity of this virtue, you would sooner lose all your earthly possessions, than expose yourselves to the danger of being deprived of it by any grievous sin. In order to animate you still more, with an earnest desire to preserve charity in your souls, I shall now proceed to say a few words

II. *On the excellence of that sublime virtue.* "And, now, there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three; but, the greatest of these is charity," says St. Paul in the Epistle of this day. Faith, that necessary virtue for salvation, without which it is impossible to be saved; and hope, that divine gift by which the confessors of the faith triumphed, the martyrs endured

with joy the torturing rack, the devouring flames, the fierce combats of the arena,—this sublime Faith, this saving Hope are less, says the Apostle, than divine Charity; for, Faith and Hope shall fail and pass away, when Charity will be perfected forevermore in heaven. “Charity,” to use, again, the words of St. Augustine, “is the queen virtue, around which all the others, as it were, centre, and from which they derive their value and their merit;—for faith itself, without charity, is dead.” Charity is the soul and life-giving principle of all our good works. Hear, again, the Apostle of the Gentiles: “Charity,” he says, “is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up.” In vain does he who has not the love of God in his heart, lay claim to the virtue of patience or meekness. How much, soever, he may strive to manifest patience—it may be for the sake of pleasing men and gaining their applause, (since all unite in praising the patient and the meek),—without charity, the genuine virtue cannot exist in the heart. Without charity, all meekness and patience, all forbearance and self-sacrifice, become worthless in the eyes of God who searcheth the reins and the heart, and who is the sole, infallible judge of the good and evil of his creatures. Self-denial and self-sacrifice for the sake of the neighbor and all kindred virtues are, so to speak, the legitimate offspring of charity. Behold the Apostles and apostolic men; mark the heroic sacrifices of those who toil and labor for the corporal and spiritual interests of their fellow-beings; what prompts them thus to deprive themselves of all human ease and comfort? Charity, my dear brethren, the love of that God, who, as St. John says, “*is charity.*” Without charity, the soul is destitute, poor, naked, and dead; with charity, the soul is rich, full of life and vigor, because it possesses God; for, “he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.” 1. John 4: 16. Charity is the note of the children of God, the characteristic by which they are distinguished from the reprobate. (St. Aug.) It is the oil of that heavenly lamp which guides us through life, directing our footsteps safely through the many dangers and temptations to which we are exposed; it is the wedding garment with which we must be clothed, in order to be admitted to the nuptials of the Son of God. What more can we say, my dear Christians, to induce you to appreciate that queen of virtues, than that it leads those who have the happiness to possess it, to the mansions of eternal life; and, since “charity never faileth, whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed,”—that it constitutes the everlasting bliss and supreme delight of Christ’s elect in the holy kingdom of his Father.

Our blessed Lord has said: “I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I, but that it be kindled?” (Luke 12: 49.) That fire, which Jesus Christ wishes to be enkindled in the hearts of his disciples and of all those who shall believe in him, is *charity*, by which the guilty world was to be enlightened and purified; the clouds of ignorance, idolatry, and

paganism dispelled, and the souls of his followers cleansed from every stain of sin and unholy passion.

*Charity* is the gold which the Holy Ghost (in the Apocalypse, 3: 18) pressingly invites the Bishop of Ephesus to purchase for himself: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest become rich; and mayest be clothed in white garments, that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear." In fine, my dear Christians, *Charity* is that great and principal virtue without which it is impossible to fulfil our duties, in whatever station of life we may be placed. With the love of God in our hearts, nothing is difficult or impossible; the most arduous duties become easy, the heaviest crosses become light,—for Jesus Christ himself has said: "My yoke is sweet and my burden is light," (Matth. 11: 30) to such as love God above all things. Let us, then, ask of God who is *Charity*, and from whom divine love springs as from its fountain-head,—let us implore the God of love to send down upon us that Holy Spirit by whom charity is diffused in our hearts: "*Caritas diffusa est in cordibus nostris*," (Rom. 5: 5) to the end that we may be enabled to serve him in a manner pleasing to him in life, and by so doing may merit eternal salvation. Let us exclaim with St. Augustine: "I will love thee, O God, my strength,—I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, and my support! (St. Aug. in Ps. 17: 2.)

In conclusion, I exhort and entreat you, my beloved brethren, to ask our dear Lord Jesus Christ during the holy sacrifice of the Mass, with all the fervor of your soul, more and more to enkindle in your hearts that divine fire of charity, with which he wishes us to be inflamed in time and eternity. With the great St. Augustine pray: "O Fire that always burnest and never ceasest to inflame, O *Charity*, my God, do thou inflame my heart!" (Conf. 10: 40.) Thus, by repeated and most fervent acts of divine love, you may confidently hope that the God of love will abide in you, and you in him; and that the fiery darts of the enemy of your salvation will not prevail against you. When a blazing fire is enkindled by travelers in a forest, the wild beasts of the woods dare not approach the camp,—so may our hearts, dear friends, be so inflamed and glowing with charity that Satan and his emissaries will never venture to approach us and the sins of the past will be consumed, like straw, by the surpassing heat of that necessary and most excellent of virtues. Glory be to the Eternal Father who so loved the world as to give it his only-begotten Son, and may he, through his Holy Spirit, (the love of the Father and the Son,) fill our hearts, dear brethren, with the fire of *Charity* and abide with us forever! Amen.

Rev. L. BAX.

## ON THE GRACES BESTOWED BY OUR LORD IN THE PROCESSION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

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A SERMON FOR THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE FORTY HOURS' DEVOTION.

*"And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by."* Luke 18: 37.

We read in the holy Gospel by St. Luke, my dear brethren, that on a certain day, our blessed Lord with his disciples, going towards Jerusalem, went by Jericho, a small town on his way, and met a "blind man, sitting by the wayside begging." This poor, unfortunate, and most sorely afflicted man, when he heard the noise of the multitude pressing along, asked "what this (concourse) meant; and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by" (36, 37). No sooner had the blind man heard this welcome news, than realizing his misery, and humbly believing that our divine Lord had power to relieve him and cure him of his infirmity,—he made haste to cry out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (38). The men who accompanied our Lord, either through respect for his dignity, or because they did not wish him to be interrupted, or delayed in his journey, rebuked the blind man and told him to hold his peace, or, in other words, to be silent. "But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me," (39). Then, Jesus paused in his way, and moved with compassion, commanded the importunate sufferer to be brought to him. And, when he had drawn nigh, having asked him: "What wilt thou, that I do to thee?" the poor man with confidence manifesting the desire of his heart, said: "Lord, that I may see." And Jesus said to him: "Receive thy sight, thy faith hath made thee whole." And the Gospel adds, that "immediately he saw and followed him, glorifying God," (40-43). The history of this beautiful and striking miracle, the edifying conduct of the blind man, the consoling clemency of our blessed Lord, and his loving attention to the afflicted pauper by the wayside, constitute a suitable and appropriate subject, my dear brethren, on which I propose to address you to-day.

*I. In the blind man of the Gospel I behold a clear type of a multitude of Christians, who are blind in the sight of God because they wilfully close the eyes of the soul to the brilliant light of divine grace.*

*II. In Jesus of Nazareth, passing by, I behold our Lord in the Adorable Eucharist, unseen, indeed, by the eyes of the body, yet plainly visible to the eyes of faith, preceded by his devout attendants, and passing along these aisles in the solemn procession which inauguates the devotion of the Forty Hours' Exposition.*

*III. In the words: "Thy faith hath made thee whole," I consider how our Lord mercifully opens and enlightens the darkened eyes of those who, with the poor man of the Gospel, call upon him with faith, imploring of his mercy: "Lord, that I may see!"*

I. The holy prophet David, speaking of those who are blinded by their unholy passions, says: *Oculos habent, et non videbunt.* "They have eyes, and see not." (Ps. 113:13.) Is not this the case, my brethren, with the vast majority of those who know the truths of our holy religion, who understand the necessity of believing, and yet refuse to practice what they believe? Carried away by their passions and sensual appetites,—one man by the sinful pleasures of the flesh; another, by the desire of self-aggrandizement; still another, by vanity or an inordinate craving after wealth and luxury,—they close their eyes to the light of God's holy inspirations, and steel their hearts against the impressions made by the pious and virtuous examples around them. Had the poor blind man of the Gospel failed to make use of the occasion when Jesus passed by Jericho, never, (we may verily believe,) would he have recovered his sight. Had he listened to those who, in vain, endeavored to hinder him from calling upon the mighty Healer for help, he would have remained blind and, like many others, when too late, would have bitterly deplored his folly. The last day will reveal to us, my dear brethren, vast numbers of unhappy Christians who have not embraced the opportunities afforded them by a merciful and loving Saviour, and who have obstinately refused to have the eyes of their hearts opened by his divine power, to the end that they might see, what was good for the interests of their immortal souls. The day will surely come when the whole world shall see and know those miserable ones, who wilfully blinded themselves to the light of heaven,—yea, hardened their hearts against the motions of divine grace, admonishing them to quit their evil and sinful habits and return in humble contrition to their God. We sincerely hope and pray that none of you, my dear Christians, belong to that class of Catholics who, knowing their sinful and unhappy condition, still prefer to sit "in darkness and the shadow of death" sooner than break down the gloomy barriers of their passions which shut them out from the blessed light and warmth of the divine Sun of Justice. No, no, my beloved brethren, should your souls unhappily be in the state of mortal sin,—should you, even until now, have refused to be guided by those brilliant rays of grace which have so often shone upon your darkened eyes, directing you, at once, to change your course, to leave the dangerous path in which you have so long been treading, O, remember that to-day, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, will soon pass by;—you are privileged to be of the multitude preceding or following him in his passage through this Church,—you will hear, you will listen, you will cry out to him: "Lord, that I may see!" and, then, with joy, you

will open your blinded hearts to the touch of his gentle hand, to receive the impressions of divine grace which he is prepared to bestow upon you. I repeat, that soon through these sacred aisles, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will pass by; and thus I come, my dear friends, to the second point of my discourse.

II. The multitude accompanying our Lord in his journey past Jericho, seem to have been aware of his great dignity and power. In their hearts they respected him, and in their exterior they very plainly manifested their regard for him. On being questioned as to who it was that passed along the road, they replied unhesitatingly that it was Jesus of Nazareth; and, then, not thinking it proper, nor respectful, that he should be disturbed or delayed in his progress to Jerusalem, they reproved the blind man for his importunity, and commanded him to be still, to hold his peace.

To-day, my dear brethren, in this church you behold every thing prepared as for a great feast; you see before you an unusually large number of men and altar boys, eagerly awaiting the close of the holy sacrifice of the Mass when they will be privileged to accompany our Lord Jesus Christ in his journey through these aisles. Yes, my beloved Christians, you know it well, you believe it firmly, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, forever,—the selfsame Messiah who from Sichem went by Jericho unto Jerusalem, where he was to be crucified, the same eternal Son of the eternal Father, who has come to save and redeem us, Jesus Christ, the second divine Person of the adorable Trinity, is here truly and really present in the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Carried by the hands of his minister, the priest, accompanied by the Levites and attendants of his sanctuary; preceded by the people with lighted candles in their hands, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who healed the sick and gave sight to the blind, will soon pass solemnly by. The grave, sweet chant of the Church will shortly admonish you of his approach, and on bended knees, in profound and humble adoration, you will offer him the loving homage of your hearts. May it not chance to be, my dear brethren, that amongst this multitude there is, perhaps, some hapless blind man, who, like his prototype of the Gospel, may be heard to exclaim: "What does this mean?" and, hearing within him the voice: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by,"—may it not be that he will cry out with him of old: "Have mercy on me, O Son of David!" And, if the sinful habits and the unruly passions, which have hitherto prevented him from seeing the path of repentance in which he should walk,—rebuke him and bid him hold his peace, O may God grant, that, then, with still greater fervor, he exclaim: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" I know not, my beloved friends, if such an afflicted one be, to-day, in our midst,—I sincerely hope, on the other hand, that all here present at this beautiful Devotion, at this solemn opening of the Forty Hours' Prayer, are in God's holy friendship, with no mortal sin to bind or blind the clear vision of their

immortal souls! Yet, may it not be, and have we not sufficient reason to fear, that some who will accompany our Lord on his journey of love to-day, or whom he will pass by in his progress through these holy aisles, though they know him to be Jesus of Nazareth, veiled under the humble appearance of bread,—will yet refuse to open their eyes to his divine light, or to remove the cloud of sin and passion which obscures their spiritual sight, and hinders them from distinguishing truth from falsehood, a real from an imaginary good? Should there be only one such blind man here present, my dear brethren, should there be only one such unhappy Christian, who, enslaved to his disorderly appetites cannot see, yet knows and feels, the sad condition of his soul,—to such a one I say: “Courage, my friend, and do not despair, no matter how desperate your case may be. Listen no longer to what the enemies of your salvation whisper in your ears; listen no longer to those false friends who would deter you by their remonstrances from seeking and serving your God and Saviour, but hearken to the sublime voice of the Holy Spirit, speaking to your hearts, and resolutely exclaim: “‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ O Jesus, thou hast come into the world to save sinners; thou hast given thy blood to cleanse our souls from the withering stain of sin; thou art the Light of the world, do thou remove the veil from my eyes, that I may see!” And Jesus, attending to the prayer of the humble and contrite heart, will pause in his journey and bid the Angels bring you, forthwith, to his feet.

III. He commanded the blind man to be brought to him, and when he was come near, having asked him what he wanted, and having received the answer that he craved the cure of his infirmity, our Blessed Lord said to him: “Receive thy sight, thy faith hath made thee whole!” O, how great, dear Christians, is the goodness and mercy of God, even to those who have for a time wilfully closed their eyes to the evil they were committing in following sin and the world; and whose hearts, alas! have been enslaved for a time to unlawful and, even, degrading passions! The unfortunate sheep may have gone astray, for a while, from the rest of the safely-guarded flock, but if it will only show itself to the shepherd, as it were, from a distance, and by its mournful cry manifest its desire to return to the fold, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will immediately cry out to his attendant Angels: “Make haste and bring that unfortunate sheep, that hapless sinner to me, that I may open his eyes and permit him to see how good and merciful the Lord is, how sweet and amiable are the ways of divine love!” Ah! my dear brethren, many a wayward child has been restored to the bosom of God, his loving Father, on those blessed occasions when Jesus passed by, even as, to-day, he will pass by all who are worshipping in this church at the Forty Hours' Devotion. Who is there among us, my dear Christians, who has not reason to confess, that he has been more or less afflicted in the past, and, (it may be,) is still afflicted in the present with a

species of spiritual blindness? Is it not true, that the world with its vanities and dangerous amusements has sometimes clouded the eyes of our faith, so that we were not able to see clearly the things that are of God? Is it not true that the trials of life,—poverty, sickness, or death amongst those dear to us, have become as a thick veil thrown over our weeping eyes, obscuring “the Light of men, . . . the true Light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world,” and preventing us from seeing that it was his kind and loving Providence which permitted us to suffer those afflictions, and ordained them solely to bring us closer to himself? In a word, has not sin more or less estranged us from our Saviour and Redeemer? Ah! then, to-day, my dear brethren, we will attend more faithfully to the whispers of divine grace, and when we hear, each one of us, the voice of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament crying to us as he passes by: “What wilt thou that I should do to thee?”—let us respond in accents of exceeding faith and fervor: “‘Lord that I may see.’ Grant, O my adorable Saviour, that I may more fully understand the delusions of the world; that I may know the dangers that beset my soul, that I may distinguish between good and evil, and see clearly that the path which leads to destruction and eternal misery, is the broad road of unlicensed pleasure; and that, striving sedulously to avoid it, I may walk in the narrow path of self-denial, which leadeth to life everlasting. ‘Lord, that I may see’ the errors of my past career, to shun them in the future by practicing the virtues proper to my state of life. ‘Lord, that I may see’ and understand my ingratitude towards a God of infinite mercy and tenderness, who, to save me, has delivered himself to be crucified; and who, to manifest his love for me still further, remains day and night abiding in the holy tabernacle of the altar!” Thus, my dearly beloved Christians, we shall draw down upon us, so to speak, the compassionate glance of Jesus as he passes by; and he will say to us, as he said to the blind man of the Gospel: “Receive thy sight, thy faith has made thee whole.” Receive your sight, O reckless young man, and behold, in time, the abyss into which you are rushing when you frequent those dangerous places and associate with those immoral companions, so fatal to your purity in the past. Receive your sight, O frivolous young woman, and take heed of those treacherous shoals and quicksands of vanity which, if not avoided with care, will cause in the end, your shipwreck in an ocean of shame and misery. Receive your sight, O ye careless and lukewarm fathers and mothers, and seeing, make haste to arise from that miserable quagmire into which you have fallen by neglecting your sacred duties to your families. Receive your sight, my beloved followers, one and all, and, opening the eyes of your spirit, endeavor, at last, to understand the full significance of that question: “What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Matt. 16: 26.

In conclusion, I exhort you, my dear Christians, to attend to the words of the inspired prophet-king addressed of old to the favored children of

Israel. You know how that chosen people were blest by God amongst all the nations of the earth; you also know, how, on various occasions, they so ungratefully rebelled against the Most High and refused to listen to the voice of Moses. "To day," so spoke that God-sent Prophet-king, "to day, if you shall hear his voice, (the voice of the Lord,) harden not your hearts." Ps. 94: 8. If you, my poor children, who are pressed down by the heavy weight of sin as Jesus passes by, if *you* should hear him say to you: "Give up that bad and sinful habit, abandon at once your evil and immoral ways," do not harden your hearts, but with ardent desire and sincere faith say: "O Lord, grant that I may see!" And you, O faithful Christians, if your troubled hearts, anxious to serve God more perfectly, are discouraged at the sight of your own miseries and short-comings,—if, to-day, you hear it whispered in the ears of your soul: "Come to me, all you that labor, and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you," (Matt. 11: 28,) know, that it is the voice of Jesus calling to you to have courage, and to seek in his sacred Heart the grace of final perseverance. If bowed down by disease, or crushed by cruel adversities,—your Saviour, (neglected and ignored by so many in the adorable Eucharist,) speaks to you from under the humble appearances of bread, and sweetly says to you: "Take up your cross and follow me." Hearken to his voice, I implore you, and with faith and unlimited confidence, ask him to let you see, how good and blessed it is to walk in the royal road of the cross. In fine, my dear brethren, let all be attentive to the inspirations of grace, and do not permit our divine Lord to pass by to-day, without asking of him that blessing, that favor, which each soul most needs in its present necessities. And even as he stood still of old on his way to Jerusalem, and listened with mercy to the prayer of the poor blind man by the wayside, so will he attend to our prayer, if it proceed from an humble and contrite heart, and will impart to our souls that light and strength which they so sorely need in their long and wearisome journey to the New Jerusalem, whither we shall, one day, follow him, by the help of his divine grace, seeing and glorifying God forevermore. Amen.

Rev. L. BAX.

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## LENTEN SERMONS.

## FIRST FRIDAY IN LENT.

## I. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

*“How canst thou say: I am not polluted? See thy ways, know what thou hast done; as a swift runner pursuing his course.” Jer. 2: 23.*

According to the intention of the Church, my dear brethren, we shou'd employ this holy season of Lent in weeping over and doing penance for our sins. But are we sinners, indeed? Ask the prophet Jeremiah, and listen humbly to the scathing reproach of his reply: “How canst thou say: I am not polluted? See thy ways, know what thou hast done; *as a swift runner pursuing his course.*” Ask the Apostle St. John, and he, too, will tell you: “If we say, that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” 1. John 1: 8. In fine, my dear brethren, ask your own consciences, look at the record of your lives,—how polluted are both, and what a dark vision of sin stares you in the face! Are you going to continue your criminal and sinful career? Are you not resolved to relinquish your bad habits, to restrain your unruly passions, to avoid the occasions of sin, and to make good use of the means of grace for the amendment of your lives? O, how sad and deplorable will be the consequences, if you do not adopt the latter salutary course! Everything in this holy season urges you to do penance, and “we, helping, do exhort you” to make this holy resolution, and by putting it at once into execution, to bring forth fruits worthy of penance. To this end, I shall speak to you, my dear brethren, in these, my instructions for the Fridays of Lent, *on the sinners' return to God.*

The subject of my first discourse, (which I shall deliver briefly to you to-day,) is the question: “*What hast thou done?*” And in answer to that important question, I will proceed to show that you have

- I. *Forsaken your God, and*
- II. *Offended your God.*

I. In the Sacred Scriptures we find it recorded of the sinner, numberless times, that he has forsaken his God. “The beloved *forsook God* who made him, and departed from God, his Saviour.” Deut. 32: 15. And again: “Woe to the sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, ungracious children: *they have forsaken God, they have blasphemed*

the Holy One of Israel, they have gone away backwards." Is. 1: 8. And in the prophet Osee, we read: "*They have forsaken the Lord* in not obeying the law." Osee 4: 10. This forsaking God, means that the sinner turns away from God and walks in other paths than those prescribed by his divine law. Does that signify anything? Is it, dear friends, a matter of little or great importance? Listen and you shall hear. You have forsaken your God,

1. *To whom you are bound by so many ties.* Know, that a sacred, three-fold bond unites man with his God.

a) *The bond of Creation.* "Let us make man to our image and likeness. . . . And God created him to his own image, and to the image of God he created him." Gen. 1: 26, 27. "The spirit of God made me, and the breath of the Almighty gave me life." Job 33: 4. God is your Creator, and you are his creature, the work of his hands. The book is the property of the man who writes it; the picture is the property of the artist who paints it; the marble image is the property of the sculptor who chisels it,—so, in a much higher and more binding sense, *you* are the property of God who has made you. What a holy bond between him and you,—and, yet, you have broken this bond by your sins, you have forsaken your God!

b) *The bond of Redemption.* "There is one God, and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a redemption for all." 1. Tim. 2: 5. "Blotting out the hand-writing of the decree which was against us; and the same he took out of the way fastening it to the Cross." Col. 2: 14. God is your Redeemer, and you are his redeemed ones, bought not with gold, or silver, or precious stones, but with the adorable Blood shed, (yea, even to its last drop,) from the veins of the only begotten Son of the Eternal Father. What a holy bond between him and you; and, yet, you have sundered this bond by your iniquities,—you have forsaken your God!

c) *The bond of sanctification.* "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the spirit of our God." 1. Cor. 6: 11. "By the justice of one, unto all men unto justification of life." Rom. 5: 18. God, your Sanctifier and you the sanctified; the breath of his infinite wisdom and holiness breathing continually the most precious inspirations and graces into your souls! What a holy bond! And, yet, you have torn apart this blessed bond,—you have forsaken your God. Will you, then, be able to say: "Of what consequence is sin?" O, how holy the bonds that unite you with your God! The ties which unite you to a friend, to your child, to your wife, husband, father, or mother are not so holy as these celestial ties,—yet, you would hesitate to break friendship with those dear ones whom you so tenderly love. And this God, to whom you are bound by divine bonds,—you have forsaken him,—you have despised his love, and turned your back upon his

laws. Is not sin something awful, if considered in this light alone? . . . But it has a worse aspect still. You have forsaken

2. *The God to whom you have promised fidelity.*

a) *In holy Baptism.* At the sacred baptismal font, my dear brethren, you promised before heaven and earth that you would never forsake your God during your whole future life. It is true, you may not have made this promise with your own tongue, with your own conscious will, but by the lips of your sponsor, who held you, a little speechless baby, at the font; nevertheless, the promise binds you just as strongly as if you had raised your hand to bear witness to the solemn oath. "The baptismal vows are inviolable, and though all other vows may be remitted, no one, either in heaven or upon earth, can loose and free a soul from its baptismal vows." St. Aug. Epist. 116.

b) *At your first Communion.* In that holy hour you ratified your baptismal vows. Think of that blissful moment when you were united for the first time, to the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! In glowing love and innocence, you knelt at the foot of the altar, and promised to God and all the Saints, before the whole congregation whom you called upon as witnesses of your vows, that you would renounce the devil with all his works, the world with all its pomps, the flesh with all its temptations, and that you would remain faithful to God all the days of your life, allowing nothing to separate you from the love of Christ.

c) *On many other subsequent occasions.* You had heard, perhaps, a touching sermon;—you were saved from some great calamity;—you had received, perchance, some great and special benefit from God;—you were enlightened in prayer, you confessed and received Communion with unusually fervent dispositions. On all these occasions, you renewed that first holy bond of love with your God, you made the earnest resolution to give your hearts entirely to him; thenceforth, to love him sincerely and to serve him faithfully. Is it not so, my brethren?

And what have you done? Alas! I repeat the painful question. *What have you done?* Notwithstanding, your solemn promises, vows, and oaths, you have forsaken God; yes, you have forsaken him repeatedly and wilfully, by drunkenness, enmity, hatred, pride, impurity. And is *this* a matter of little or no importance? Is it a small thing for a soldier to forsake the banner of his country to which he has vowed loyalty and allegiance? Is it a trifling thing for a married person to dishonor and violate the bonds of matrimony which he solemnly promised to keep inviolate unto death? God bitterly complains of man, because he, thus, forsakes his Creator and Redeemer. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this; and ye gates thereof, be very desolate, saith the Lord. For, my people have done two evils. They have *forsaken* me, the fountain of living water, and have

digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”  
Jer. 2: 12, 13.

II. What have you done? You have not only offended your Creator, your Redeemer, but, also, your Preserver and your Sanctifier. “You have grieved the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.” Ephes. 4: 30. Sin is truly an offence against God; not as if God thereby felt or experienced pain, but, because sin is a contempt of God, a rejection of his sacred law, a rebellion against his adorable will. Hence, sin is also called enmity against God, as the Apostle says: “The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God.” Rom. 8: 7. Moreover, it is a sacrilegious renewal of the crucifixion of Christ. “Crucifying again to themselves the son of God, and making a mockery of him.” Heb. 6: 6. What have you done? You have offended God, yes

1. *Your great God.* The offence is aggravated by the dignity of the person offended. What a difference, my brethren, between an insult offered to a servant or one cast in the face of a king! The sinner offends a great God:

a) *Great in power and majesty.* “Thine are riches, and thine is glory, thou hast dominion over all, in thy hand is power and might, in thy hand greatness, and the empire of all things.” 1. Paralip. 29: 12. “Who shaketh the earth of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.” Job 9: 6. “Who shall resist the strength of thy arm?” Wisd. 9: 6. “No word shall be impossible with God.” Luke 1: 37. To be brief, dear friends, all the greatness and power of earthly potentates and princes are limited and finite,—God, alone, is *infinite* power and majesty.—He, alone, is:

b) *Great in glory.* “The Lord shall sit king forever.” Ps. 28: 10. “His name, alone, is exalted.” Ps. 148: 13. “There is none like to thee, O Lord, thou art great, and great is thy name in might.” Jer. 10: 6. “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” 1. Tim. 6: 15.—This God, great in power and majesty, and great in glory, before whom the pillars of heaven tremble, to whom heaven and earth are subject, and whom the Angels adore with hidden faces,—you, a poor miserable worm of the earth have offended.

2. *Your good God.* The insult is aggravated by the base ingratitude of the offender. If it be a cruel act to insult a stranger from whom you have never received a kindness or benefit of any sort, what can you say, my brethren, of a child, who strikes his father or his mother? And you have offended this infinitely good God, who is:

a) *So good towards all creatures.* “Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild.” Ps. 85: 5. God wills the true happiness of all his creatures, and promotes their welfare in every possible way. He gives splendor to the

sun, light to the moon and to the stars, color to the flowers, and a garment of soft feathers to the birds. "Thou openest thy hand and fillest with blessing every living creature." Ps. 144: 16.

b. *So good towards you in particular.* "What hast thou, that thou hast not received?" 1. Cor. 4: 7. Consider the wonderful and delicate mechanism of your body,—the immortal essence and beautiful powers of your soul; look back with tears of gratitude upon your past life, from the first moment of your existence to this present hour. Consider all that you have lived through; weigh seriously and carefully every inspiration, every blessing, every signal mercy he has showered upon you, and you will find that God has overwhelmed you with benefits without measure, without number; benefits, both spiritual and temporal, of which you were wholly undeserving, and which you valued or appreciated so little that you scarcely thought it worth your while to thank your great Benefactor for his gifts and graces. Like a father, he has carried you in his arms; like a mother, he has poured out his love upon you. "What is there, that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it?" Is. 5: 4. And *what have you done* in return?

You have offended this great, this good God, by every sin you have committed; by your pride, your anger, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. You have offended him not once and slightly, but grievously, and innumerable times. Look well, my brethren, into your life, into your thoughts, words and actions. O, what a horrid vision of sin stares you in the face! Are you not forced to cry out with the royal prophet: "My iniquities are gone over my head, and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me." Ps. 37: 5. *What have you done?* O, let not this thought depart from your mind, though it should pierce your heart like a two-edged sword, though it should burn in its depths like coals of living fire,—cast not away this salutary thought, dear friends, till it effects, by the grace of God, a thorough and lasting conversion; till it leaves you, at length, firmly resolved to return to your God during this holy season of Lent, and to continue to do penance for your past ingratitude and sin, during all the coming days of your life. Amen.

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## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

## ON THE NECESSITY AND UTILITY OF FASTING.

*“When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards hungry.” Matt. 4: 2.*

The precept to fast and abstain is of a very ancient date,—almost as old as the world itself. It was given to our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden: “Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat: for, in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die.” Fasting, or rather, abstinence, was, as it were, the life-preserver of our first parents; so long as they made use of it, all went well with them,—God was their friend; but the moment they transgressed his precept in that regard, they heard a voice, saying: “Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.” By their disobedience to the law of God, they barred heaven against themselves and their descendants, and opened to us all, the gates of hell. The eating of the forbidden fruit was the cause of the ruin of our first parents and of their whole posterity: whilst abstinence from what is forbidden by divine command, is the true means of man’s salvation. Adam, by his disobedience, lost the gift of immortality, the grace of holiness, original justice, and innocence; Jesus, the second Adam, came to repair this disastrous evil by obedience, self-denial, mortification, and fasting. He taught us by his example, to elevate ourselves again to that life of grace which we had forfeited, not, however, by gratifying our appetites, not by allowing our passions to rule over us, but, by subjecting the flesh to the spirit. He fasted in a wild and lonely desert for the space of forty days and forty nights. He fasted, my brethren, as no man ever did; fasted although he was innocent, fasted not for himself, but for us. Yet, for all that, his fasting does not exempt *us* from the duty of fasting; on the contrary, we must fast in our turn, and, moreover, we must unite our fasting with his fasting, if we wish it to be meritorious to eternal life.

I say, then, *fasting is necessary and useful.*

I. My dear Christians, since *fasting is necessary*, in order to convince ourselves of its vital necessity, let us but take into consideration the *many sins* which we have committed since we first came to the use of reason down to this present day; let us examine into the *many passions and sinful inclinations of our hearts*, and which are never entirely subdued; let us reflect upon the

*myriad temptations* that surround us on all sides. By our manifold sins and excesses we have offended God most grievously; we have outraged his infinite majesty, we have attacked his divine rights and prerogatives; we have said, if not in word, at least in deed: *Non serviam*,—"I will not serve, I will not obey." Poor, miserable worms of the earth as we are, we have aspired to the independence of a God, not regarding or respecting his sacred commandments; and these, our sins, cry to heaven for vengeance. We know and are sure that we are sinners, that we have sinned against heaven and earth, but where is our contrition, where, the penance we have done for our sins? Can we exhibit to the eyes of men and Angels any signs of an adequate repentance? If we contemplate the vast multitude of those holy penitents who, on account of a single mortal sin, have wept bitterly during all the remaining years of their earthly career, and if we compare our sensual and effeminate lives with the penitential lives of the Saints,—alas! what a contrast! If a spark of genuine Christian feeling remains in our breasts, must we not be ashamed of our slothfulness and self-indulgence? It is true we have made *many good resolutions and promises* during our lives, but have we kept them? We are ready enough in promising, my brethren, but very slow in executing what we promise. Who can boast of having preserved, pure and undefiled, through the years of youth and maturity, the white garment of innocence with which we were clothed at our baptism? Are there many, who can claim that happy privilege? Who among us, dear Christians, has never committed a mortal sin?—How often, alas! after having been washed clean from our iniquities in the blood of the Lamb, how often have we not returned to the mire! To-day, at the beginning of the forty days' fast, I implore of you, dear friends, lay your hands upon your hearts and examine your interior a little more carefully and earnestly than you usually do. Look into the depths of your souls with an impartial eye, and, each one of you, make haste to ask yourself seriously: "How do matters stand with me? Am I ready and prepared to appear this moment before the all-knowing Judge and render an account of my stewardship?" If conscience returns an unfavorable answer, O my brethren, is it not then time to embrace a penitential life, in order to appease the just anger of God? You know that the least sin will be punished by him who is infinite Purity, infinite Justice; that we must render an account, yea, even of every idle word, and that if we do not voluntarily satisfy for our delinquencies here, we shall be compelled to do so hereafter. "I say to thee, thou shalt not go out thence," (from prison,) "until thou payest the very last mite." St. Luke 12: 59. Fasting and good works are the best and most powerful weapons to disarm the offended justice of God. Remember, my dear brethren, the history of the Ninivites of old; the justice of God had already decreed their extirpation: "Forty days hence, and your city shall be destroyed!" When they heard those terrible words, the affrighted people were not deaf to the warning, neither

did they mock at Jonas nor laugh him to scorn, but they began immediately to do penance, saying: "Perhaps God will spare us, if we do penance for our sins." O sinners! what will you answer, if I cry out to you: "Forty days hence, your city, (that is, your body,) shall be destroyed?" Can I venture to promise any one of you, dear Christians, even that much time? Alas! no. We know not the day nor the hour. Perhaps, to-day, or to-morrow, or after a few brief days, you will die, you will return into dust; why, then, do you not imitate at once the holy example of the Ninivites? Why do you not, in *your* turn, embrace a penitential life?

Christ not only taught us by his example that we should fast, but, also, by his word,—saying to the disciples of John that, after the departure of the Bridegroom, his disciples would fast. We are no less exempt from this obligation, than were our ancestors in the faith. We, like them, are bound to do penance for our sins, bound to curb the internal concupiscence which reigns in every child of Adam; for *this* kind of devil is not expelled except by fasting and prayer. Christ emphatically declares, that unless we do penance, we shall all likewise perish. In effect, something must be done, for the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and only the violent bear it away; the kingdom of heaven suffers violence in these our days, as well as in former times; we must do penance in one way or in another, and endeavor to become conformable to the image of the Son of God, if we wish to be of the number of the elect. Nay, my dear brethren, even if we were assured by an angel from heaven of the happy forgiveness of our sins, yet would we not be justified in neglecting the regulations of Lent, or in failing to do penance. Something might yet stand against us of the temporal punishment due to sin, even after the guilt of mortal sin and its eternal punishment had been remitted. King David was assured by Nathan, the prophet, that his sin was forgiven, and yet he continued to do penance all the days of his life. Mary Magdalene had the happiness to hear the words of absolution from the lips of our divine Saviour himself, and yet she spent the remainder of her life in the constant and rigorous exercise of penance. St. Peter was not only forgiven, but even raised to the dignity of Prince of the Apostles and Head of the Church, yet, he is said to have wept for his denial of Christ until his cheeks were furrowed by his tears,—he never forgot that he had sinned, and that, consequently, he was obliged to do penance for his sin. We, also, know, that we have sinned, and, therefore, that we are equally bound to do penance for our sins. Adam and Eve in the state of original justice and innocence, were commanded to abstain from the fruit of a certain tree, how much more are we bound to fast and abstain, who are guilty of many sins for which we have not yet satisfied the justice of God? David, Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, were assured of the forgiveness of their sins, and yet they did penance, should we not, then, my brethren, also do penance, who have no such assurance of pardon?

Let us suppose for a moment, that you have confessed all your sins and

received absolution, that, in short, you have complied with all the conditions necessary for a good confession. Suppose you are at present, (and heaven grant it may, indeed, be so!) in the state of grace and in the friendship of God,—of which no one, however, can have an explicit assurance without a special revelation from God,—even *then*, it would be necessary for you, my brethren, to fast and do penance in order to bridle your corrupt inclinations, to subdue your rebellious flesh, and come off victorious over the many temptations which are constantly alluring you to fall into sin. We must fast and do penance, not only because we have sinned in the past, but, to the end that we may sin no more in the future; fasting is a preservative against sin, as well as a means to obtain the forgiveness of sin.

Some will say, perhaps: *I do nothing out of the way, I am no grievous sinner,—why, then, should I fast?* The words of Christ, in this connection, admit of but one interpretation: “Unless you do penance, you shall *all* likewise perish.” He does not except any one. You tell me, that you are no sinner? St. John the Evangelist, gentle as he was, answers you in very plain, stern words, when he declares: “He, that says, he hath no sin, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” 1. John 2: 4. Hence, when you say that you are no sinner, you prove that you *are* a sinner, and a very proud sinner, as well, and that you, more than any other, have good reason to do penance. Again, my brethren, others may say: *God is good and merciful; he wills not that man should be cruel towards himself.* It is true, God is good and merciful, and thanks be to him for his goodness and mercy,—for, were it not for those divine attributes we should all infallibly be lost;—but God is also just, as well as merciful, and he will render to every one according to his works. Some self-indulgent sinners urge again: “*Christ has fasted for us, why then should we fast?*” Say likewise, ye deluded ones, since God’s omnipotence gives growth to the grain, where, then, is the use of plowing, sowing, and manuring? It is in the order of grace as it is in the order of nature. As a man plows, sows, and manures his field, so, in the same proportion, he shall reap its harvest. And by saying this, we certainly cast no reproach on Gods’ omnipotence as the Giver of all good. Christ fasted for our sakes and for our sins; he stood in no need of fasting for himself; the infinite merits of his fasting, however, will not be applied to our souls without our co-operation. Can you reap without sowing? Can you reasonably hope to obtain life everlasting, whilst you persevere in sin? Can we refuse, my dear brethren, to join our fasts with the fasts of Jesus, when we know that we have so many sins to atone for, so many vicious affections to combat, so many unruly passions to overcome, so many evil habits to eradicate, so many dangerous occasions to encounter, both within and without us? “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It will not do to say: “Lord, Lord, I wish to go to heaven,” for, we have Christ’s own guaranty for it, that not every one

that says: "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of *his* Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Math. 7: 21.

II. Fasting is not only necessary, but also wholesome; it bridles concupiscence, it quenches the flames of lust, restrains the violence of the passions, tames the rebellious flesh, and heals the disorders of the soul as well as of the body. Fasting is the best physic to prevent or remove many corporal distempers, and the surest means to re-establish a broken constitution, since it has often been proved by experience, that certain diseases have been cured by abstinence and fasting, which had long and obstinately defied all the resources of medical science and skill. Fasting is, therefore, good in itself, and beneficial to the health of man. To fast, and to abstain occasionally from certain meats and drinks, is good, considered from a merely natural point of view. Many sicknesses are caused by eating and drinking to excess. Physicians, when called to the sick-room, very often prescribe abstinence, and order their patients to fast for a time from all food, or, at least, from certain prohibited articles of diet which tend to aggravate their disorder. In like manner, the soul of man becomes ill or enfeebled by overcharging the body with food or drink, and fasting is our only resource to free both body and soul from many evils. You will, perhaps, say that you cannot fast, that you are weak and sickly, or that Lenten fare does not agree with your constitution; in short, that fasting is a great prejudice to your health. You are really to be pitied. Your excuse is a groundless one. *Feasting*, not *fasting*, shortens the span of human life. Intemperance in eating and drinking, those riotous debauches, those intoxicating amusements which undermine and destroy the whole constitution, these are the principal causes why the young people of our present age decay and die in the bloom of their years; why their elders, in the ripeness of their years, sink into an untimely grave. Our hardy and temperate ancestors were quite unacquainted with our modern ways of living; they fasted with the greatest rigor, yet without any prejudice to their health. Live as they lived,—live, I beg of you, my dear brethren, with a like sobriety and moderation, and you will not only be healthier and more robust than you are at present, but "your days will be long in the land." *Plenus venter non studet libenter.* Experience teaches that our imagination is never purer, our mind never more serene, the heart never more tranquil, and our sleep never better and more refreshing, than when the body is not overcharged with food.

The outward observance of the precept, however, that is, the bare abstinence from meat, will avail us nothing, if we neglect the essence and the substance. The former is no more than the shell, or the external bark of our obligation,—the main design of the fast is to mortify our passions and amend our lives. To be brief, we must fast, my dear brethren, with a deep

sense of repentance for having offended God, and a firm resolution by the help of his grace to lead a new life. We must fast from pride, from covetousness, from lust, envy, anger, gluttony, and sloth. *Our eyes*, which have so often led us into the snares of the devil, should be made to fast in in their way by closing themselves to vain and criminal objects. *Our ears* should be, henceforth, deaf to all injurious discourses, and only open to edifying instruction and Christian conversation. *Our tongues* should abstain from slander, immodesty, blasphemy, and detraction, and be employed solely in glorifying God, in proclaiming his mercies, and in craving pardon for our sins. In short, *our hands* should fast from immoral actions, *our hearts* from irregular desires, and *all our senses and faculties* from the dangerous occasions of sin.—This is the great and general fast of every Christian, which admits of no dispensation, but is absolutely necessary at all times, in all places, and for all persons, both young and old, sick and healthy, rich and poor, during the whole course of their lives. This is the only true fast, for what does it avail a man to abstain from certain meats on certain days, and to wallow all the while in sin? What does it avail to abstain from drinking wine, and to be drunk at the same time with iniquity? What does it avail that our faces are pale and emaciated with fasting, if our souls are bloated with pride, and black with envy and malice? “Be converted to me,” saith the Most High, speaking by the prophet Joel: “Be converted to me with all your heart in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning; and rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God.” Joel 2: 12, 13.

The first condition, then, that must accompany our fast, is *to renounce sin*; the second, to fast *with a pure intention of pleasing God*, through a motive of religion, of penance, of mortification, of obedience to the Church, —not like the Pharisees, through a motive of vain glory and hypocrisy, or like misers, through a motive of avarice. The third condition is to *join fervent prayers and abundant alms with our fasts*, for we read that prayer is good with fasting and alms-deeds, more than to lay up treasures of gold. At least, prayer and fasting should always go hand in hand together, as inseparable companions; they are the wings of a repenting soul, by the aid of which she ascends to heaven, and effects her peace with God.

Let me, then, entreat you all, my dear brethren, to sanctify in this manner this solemn fast of Lent. Let me beseech those who are in the unhappy state of mortal sin, to approach without delay and with proper dispositions, the sacred tribunal of penance, that thus, their fasts, their alms-deeds, and their prayers may become more pleasing and meritorious in the sight of God, by being performed in the state of grace. Perhaps, this will be the last Lent for many of us. Hence, let us live soberly, justly, and piously during this holy season. Do not convert these days of grace and mercy into days of gambling, rioting, drunkenness, and perdition. Do not turn a divine remedy into a fatal poison. Do not make

this holy and acceptable time, so proper to appease the anger of God, serve only to provoke him the more. Unite your fast, my dear Christians, with the forty days' fast of your blessed Saviour, and lament and bewail all the sins of your past lives in the bitterness of your souls; it is but just that your sins should draw bitter tears from your eyes, since they drew streams of blood from the veins of your loving Jesus. "Is not this," saith the Lord, "the fast that I have chosen? Loose the bands of wickedness—and break asunder every burden. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house; when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning; and thy health shall speedily arise; and thy justice shall go before thy face . . . . . And the Lord will give thee rest continually, and will fill thy soul with brightness.—And thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water, whose waters shall not fail." Is. 58 : 5-12. A blessing which I wish you all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Altered and adapted from GAHAN.

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## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

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### THE PRODIGAL SON.

*"I will arise, and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants."* Luke 15 : 18, 19.

Our Blessed Lord came down from heaven and took flesh upon earth, to save that which was lost and to reclaim sinners from their evil ways, to the end, my dear brethren, that, being reconciled with God, they might, once more, return to their Father's house. As he was sent by that Eternal Father to seek and to save sinners, so he, also, in his humanity, sent his Apostles on the same errand, and they, faithful and obedient to their Master's injunctions, devoted their lives and energies to the preaching of the Gospel, in order to convert sinners and reconcile them with God. This has been the mission of the bishops and priests of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church during the last eighteen hundred years, and will continue to be their mission to the end of time. This is, also, the meaning and purpose of the present season of Lent. We must return to our Father and to our home. Let us, then, cleanse our souls from all sin, that the lessons of faith may sink deeper and deeper into our hearts, and that we may make ourselves acceptable to Jesus who came to seek and to save us.

In order to effect this holy end, my dear brethren, I shall bring before you, to-day, those beautiful words of our Saviour, showing how the sinner is to return to his true home, and how graciously the Eternal Father, then, receives him. It is the parable of the prodigal son which I propose to lay before you. It reads thus: A certain man had two sons. The younger demanded from his father that portion of his substance which would fall to him in time, and having received it, he went abroad into a far country and there wasted it by living riotously. When all was gone, and he was forced as a swine-herd to live upon husks in abject misery and poverty, he said to himself: "I will arise and go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." And rising up, he went to his father, and his father received him with joy. This, briefly, is the parable of the prodigal son, in which we will consider, to-day, dear Christians,

- I. The cause of his error,*
- II. His return to his father, and*
- III. The reception his father gave him.*

I. We learn from the Gospel that it was the younger son of the household who said to his father: "Give me the portion of substance which falleth to me." And the father having given it, the young man leaves home, at once, and goes abroad with his fortune into a distant country. In this young man, my dear brethren, we see plainly exemplified the peculiar characteristics of youth,—that levity, that impatience of restraint, that desire of independence which, too often, urge and goad the younger sons from the protecting influence of home. Young as he was, this wild youth of the parable thought himself a man, and, like many another youth of the present day, he believed himself to be confined too closely in his father's house, and wished to enjoy more liberty; he was tired of parental tutelage, advice, and control, and burned to join his comrades in the enjoyment of the pleasures of the world. He reasoned thus with himself: "Some day or other, I shall certainly inherit a great fortune from my father; but it would be better if I had it now in hand. I would increase it by speculation, not suffering it to lie idle as my father foolishly does; and by the business-ventures in which I would embark, I would soon be a rich man." In his boyish imprudence and inexperience, the poor young fellow does not foresee the dangers and temptations with which he must inevitably contend in such a course, but, blindly and presumptuously, throws himself into the vortex of a deceitful world.

Can we not too often, my dear brethren, trace the errors of our lives to a similar cause? We ardently long to go away from our Father and our Home; we do not feel content. Our Lord hath said: "My yoke is sweet

and my burden light,"—yet that sweet yoke of Jesus, that light burden of the Christian's duties and obligations, presses too heavily on our shrinking shoulders; we think it is not necessary to observe so strictly every precept which God and his Church impose upon us. We fret under the wholesome restraints of our Father's house, where everything tends to our salvation, and we thirst for greater liberty and a wider field of action. We demand our inheritance. And what is this inheritance which we so boldly demand of our Father in heaven? The gifts of nature and grace, those gifts which are given to us by our good God in order to work out our salvation: those gifts which he bestows upon us gratuitously and abundantly so long as we remain obedient children of Holy Mother Church, hearing her and doing what she commands, and persevering to the end in making good use of the natural and supernatural aids vouchsafed us. But when we demand them from God as a right, as a due (so to speak,) when we, in our levity and imprudence, turn our backs upon him, and imagine that even whilst separated from God by sin, we can still preserve his gifts,—O, then, my brethren, we make the grand mistake of our lives; then we fall, as so many others of our fellow-creatures do, into sin, and become lukewarm, and careless in the performance of our religious duties.

After obtaining his inheritance, the young man goes forth into the world and tasting its false delights, exclaims: "O, how charming is this life on which I now have entered! Happy that I am, I begin at last to enjoy all earthly pleasures!"—He drains the chalice of impure delights to its bitter dregs. In the extravagant enjoyments of an evil life, his substance is diminished and, in a short time, his inheritance is wasted and altogether lost. Where are now the honors, and the riches, and the pleasures, he had promised himself? His purse and his heart are alike empty; the last farthing is spent, he is poor and penniless, and, possessing nothing, every one, (as is the way of the world with the unfortunate), looks upon him with disdain. He will not beg, and work he cannot,—what, then, remains for him to do? He goes about looking for some humble employment. There was a great famine in the country in those days, and work of all kinds was scarce.—The degraded scion of a wealthy family, finding nothing better to do, went and joined himself, at last, to one of the citizens of the locality, who sent him to his farm to feed the swine. O abject misery of the proud, presumptuous spendthrift! Once, in the heyday of his abundance, he sated himself with luxuries fit for the palate of a prince, and *now*, in his need, he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him!

Sin and its fatal consequences are delineated in this parable with a force and perspicuity such as divine wisdom, alone, can make use of. When sanctifying grace, which is the gift of God and the pledge of our heavenly inheritance, is banished from the heart by sin, all other goods are diminished and finally withdrawn: the understanding is darkened, the will weak-

ened; the memory loses the thought of God and of divine things, and is filled with ideas and imaginations contrary to virtue and piety. And what is the result? There comes a famine in the kingdom of the soul; in the state of sin, my dear brethren, we hunger and we famish; our passions are excited, and crave insatiably for a food which cannot be found; and as, in a time when bread fails him, man does not scruple to devour the most disgusting offal, so a sinner who has lost through his own criminal fault the precious bread of divine grace, does not hesitate to yield himself, in the gratification of his passions, to the lowest and most degrading sins. And as the prodigal son was sent in his destitution to feed the most unclean of all animals, so the sensual sinner can conceive of no higher destiny than to feed and gratify his vile, bestial passions; and, indeed, he would fancy himself happy if he could succeed in satisfying them, but the unbridled passions of the heart of man, like the daughters of the horse-leech, are ever crying: "Give, give,"—and yet are never satisfied. Alas! to what a depth does man sink, my brethren, when he gives himself up without restraint to sin! It is this haplesss state of misery which our Lord so forcibly depicts in the parable of the prodigal son.

And how did that wretched prodigal fare in his novel and degrading position? Behold him in the woods, sitting in the shade of a tree, surrounded by those unclean animals which he is forced to feed and herd, all the while suffering himself from such keen pangs of hunger, that he envies them even the disgusting swill which it is his task to dispense to them. There he sits, dear Christians,—emaciated, pale, and bowed to the earth under the bitter burden of his miserable state. All at once, a thought arises within his heart: "How many hired servants in my father's house have plenty to eat, yet I, his son, sit here and perish with hunger!" This comparison between his own situation and that of the domestics in his dear, but once despised home, moves him strongly and makes him enter into himself. At long last, he reflects seriously on the misfortune which he has brought upon himself, and he says: "It is true I have sinned against my father and grievously offended him by my disobedience, but then, for all, he has the heart of a father, and will have compassion on me, since I am perishing with hunger and can no longer live in this way. I will arise and go to my father, and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee. I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants'."

What a true picture of the conversion of a sinful soul! When overwhelmed with misfortunes, my dear brethren, if we retire into solitude and there examine seriously into our hearts,—we will soon discover and realize what is wanting to us. How many of us have just cause to make the comparison which the prodigal made between the past and the present! Think of the days of your childhood and youth, how happy you were in your innocent devotions! You found real joy and pleasure in going, then,

to Mass and holy Communion. And now, in your spiritual want and misery, do you not feel remorse and envy when you behold the delight which others experience in the service of God? They enjoy an abundance of the Bread of Life, and feast continually at the banquet of heavenly consolations; they love to pray, to go to the Sacraments; they are faithful in the discharge of the duties of their state of life, and find their true happiness in the observance of the commandments of God and of his Church. O, do not believe, poor sinners, that it is hard to serve God,—believe me, it is harder, far harder, to live at enmity with him, your true Eternal Father; for there is a worm of remorse ever gnawing within you, which never ceases to devour your peace of mind.

What a blessing, if the comparison between past blessings and present miseries produces for you, dear brethren, the same effects which it produced upon the prodigal son! He who is solicitous to be converted, must imitate that model of humble repentance. Enlightened by the grace of God, he must resolve to surmount all obstacles that might hinder his speedy return to his Father's house. Suppose the prodigal son had thus reflected within himself: "I have hired myself to the master of these swine,—what, then, will he think, if I leave him without warning? What will my old friends think, if I go back and appear before them in the garb of a penitent? What, in short, will the world say, if I, thus, humble myself to my father?" If he had paused, my friends, to indulge in such reflections as these, he would never have returned home. Instead of that, he says with decision: "I will arise and go to my father, and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee'." He did not excuse himself; he did not, (as Adam did,) cast the blame upon another; he did not plead that the bad example or evil counsel of his companions had betrayed him into error. No, he candidly confessed his guilt, he was heroically silent as to the circumstances and occasions of his fall, and far from excusing his weakness, he declared with simple sincerity: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Oh! what humility is expressed in these words, what willingness to atone for his sins!

Such, my brethren, must, also be *our* disposition, if we desire to be truly converted to the Lord; that is, a firm conviction of the enormity of our sins, of the heinousness of our offences against so good a Father, joined to a hatred and detestation of them, a sincere sorrow for having offended God, a candid avowal of our sins, and an unconditional willingness to do and to suffer everything that may be enjoined on us in satisfaction therefor.

III. Let us now consider, dear Christians, how the penitent prodigal was received by his father. It is only with the deepest emotion, that we can read the words in which our Lord describes that touching reception.

His father saw him, says the Evangelist, when he was yet a great way off, and he was moved with compassion, and went to meet him; and falling upon his neck, he kissed him. The faithful Tobias returning to *his* father, full of honor and filial devotion, did not meet with a more enthusiastic welcome than did this wretched spendthrift, who came home in rags and misery to the sheltering roof he had once so boldly abandoned. No wonder, my dear brethren, that, overcome by the kindness of his father, he sobbed out to that long-suffering parent: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee; I am not now worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." But the good father said to the servants: "Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, because this my son was dead, and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found."

Ah! my dear Christians, thus our Father in heaven does not abandon us even in sin, but endeavors by various means to lead us back to our true Home. Already, from afar off, at our first feeble attempt to return to him, he looks down upon us with eyes of mercy, and seeing, that we make at least some little effort to correspond with the inspirations of grace, he increases his celestial attractions and gently invites us to retrace our wayward steps. He not only, like the father of the prodigal, goes to meet us, embraces us, and gives us the kiss of peace, but he restores us, as well, the robe which we had received at our baptism, the spotless garment of sanctifying grace which we had forfeited by our sins. As a pledge of our restoration to all the rights and privileges of his children, he gives us the precious signet-ring of reconciliation, and abundant graces whereby our feet are strengthened in the way of salvation. The Lamb he immolates for the festal banquet of our return, is his only begotten Son, the Lamb of God, who not only taketh away the sins of the world, but is at the same time the food and nourishment of our souls, and the pledge of our eternal salvation. All this is done for us by the divine mercy, if like the prodigal son, we arise out of our misery and return penitently to our Father's house.

Who, then, that is laden with sin would not now resolve in the sincerity of his heart to return to God? Let not this holy time pass away unacceptable to God and unprofitable to yourselves. Keep the fast of Lent in the right spirit; return to your duty, to your God. He is ready to receive you that you may become, once more, the living members of the mystical body of Christ and the pure temples of the Holy Ghost. Receive the real body of Jesus Christ as the nourishment of your spiritual life, as the pledge of your eternal salvation.

In conclusion, my dear brethren, I have only one more request to make of you. You have heard, to-day, what is the unhappy lot of those who stray away from their Father and their Father's house; you have heard, on the

other hand, how willingly and cheerfully God receives repentant sinners,—but, alas! how many there are who resist grace, how many prodigals who persistently refuse to return to their heavenly Father and their celestial Home! My request is this: Pray for them, pray for their conversion; pray that God may enlighten them by his divine wisdom to see their error, and give them strength by his divine grace to return from their evil ways. Pray for all poor sinners that they may come to the knowledge of the truth, repent of their iniquities, and be saved. You can perform no greater act of charity, my dear Christians, for over each one of those repentant sinners, the angels of heaven will rejoice “rather than over ninety-nine just, who need not penance;” and, if your prayer for the conversion of only *one* immortal soul were happily answered, it might be granted you, one day, to hear the voices of the celestial choirs, crying out with the father of the prodigal: “It was fit that we should make merry and be glad; for, this thy brother was dead, and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found!”

A. W.

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## IRELAND.

## A LECTURE FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY.

*God's Truth* preserved with unwavering fidelity by an entire nation through ages of persecution unequaled in the world's history for persistent violence and cruelty; the *Faith* once delivered to the Apostles, prized above all worldly possessions, and loved so ardently, cherished with such constancy, that a suffering people became as strangers in their own land, rather than abandon it; an *Obedience* to the divine command so complete, so unquestioning, so unfaltering, that it may well be compared to Abraham's obedience, when it required him to forsake his country and wander into the strange land of Canaan, (differing, however, from the patriarch's obedience chiefly in this, that there was no distinct promise heard by this people, as there was by Abraham, that they should certainly receive an hundred-fold in return for the sacrifice they made,)—such is the glorious spectacle, my dear friends, to which your attention is directed, to-day. It is a spectacle worthy of your admiration; nay, it will challenge the admiration of Angels and men unto the end of time. History contains not its equal in point of true moral grandeur, and it stands forth in full view of the world, an evident lesson to every man that will read it, as well as the most potent demonstration that can be imagined of the truth and divinity of our Saviour's

teachings. It is an absolutely incontrovertible proof that our holy religion, the religion of Ireland, is from God, since she can influence an entire nation to overlook all worldly and selfish interests for her sake, alone.

Well may the children of Erin glory that they belong to a nation thus distinguished above all others! Well may *we* glory, dear friends, that we are children of a Church, whose power over the minds, and whose sweet influence over the hearts of men, are the undoubted evidence of her divine authority, and a blessed assurance of her divine guidance! The arch which spans the heavens is no surer token of the over-ruling power of the Most High, than is Ireland's constancy in the faith a token of God's providence working through the Church for man's eternal welfare.

Let other nations exult in their military glory, their heroic achievements, their blood-bought conquests; let them rejoice in their present prosperity, their advancement in commerce, in the arts; in a word, in their material and social progress. It is well. But a word went out among the nations centuries ago, and its sound was heard to the uttermost bounds of the universe. And it said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Shut your eyes ever so persistently to the fact of an overruling Providence, to the fact of a future eternal life, and of a dread responsibility to a higher power for all the myriad deeds done here on earth; still, you cannot deny that it is better for a man to save his soul, than to gain the whole world, and that it is better to be true to conscience and to

God, and steadfast in the faith (which, alone, has a right to our allegiance,) than to abound in this world's goods;—nay, better even than to stand as a hero in the front ranks of human enlightenment and progress.

What? Must I feel called upon to prove the excellence of divine faith, the absolute necessity of it for the welfare of the individual and of society? Shall I be required to prove the paramount importance of eternal interests? Will it be demanded of me to offer an apology and a vindication of the mystery and economy of the Incarnation of the Son of God? Need it be demonstrated to you, at this late day in the history of Christianity, that God's truth is of infinitely greater worth than all that the world possesses besides? Why, my dear friends, there are men, to-day, who, like Solomon, have tasted all the delights of pleasure, who have ascended the pinnacle of fame, and taken the first rank in science without finding satisfaction therein, and who are now craving something higher, something worthier the ambition of an immortal soul! And they find it in the Christian religion,—thus proving that there is nothing on earth that can compare with the precious pearl of divine truth.

You and I believe that when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came upon this earth, he came to speak words of power to man, and to establish his Faith upon a durable foundation; that the work which he came to accomplish was not to set up a loose association of men, differing in every belief of the mind and every object of the heart's love,—but

to make all men of one mind, to unite one with another, as he and the Father are one.

That call went out to all the children of men. But among the nations that, at one period or another, obeyed the summons, a large proportion afterwards proved unfaithful, and, as far as in them lay, thwarted the divine idea. The great Apostolic Churches of the East, where now is their glory? Antioch, where first the followers of Jesus were called Christians; Jerusalem, which witnessed his daily walk in her public places,—afford but a precarious abode to his followers, to-day; his religion is barely permitted to exist there. The Church of Asia, which St. Paul established,—alas! its glory hath departed!—And what shall I say of Alexandria and Constantinople,—the one the seat of Christian learning and philosophy, the other, the rival even of Rome for imperial and pontifical honors?—Ah! they, too, have fallen away from the Christian religion, so that now scarce a remnant of their people remain faithful, and their conquest to Christ, if ever attempted in the future, cannot but be a doubly difficult task, since they have proved themselves unworthy of the heavenly gift by their recreancy and apostasy.

Consider, on the other hand, the churches which were added to the fold of the One Shepherd in the West, and which persevered for a longer time in the faith, or never relapsed again into the unbelief from which they had been rescued. England, once called the Isle of Saints, has scarce any regard left for the purity and perfection of the religion

of Christ. Her church threw off the yoke of Christ in the reign of the brutal Henry the Eighth, and has since been advancing by degrees to the utter denial, even in high places, of the cardinal truths of Christianity. Germany was once well-nigh lost to the faith, until by the mercy of God, through the strenuous exertions of a band of zealous men, much of the lost ground was recovered, and wavering minds were confirmed. Italy, Spain, and France were spared the curse of heresy chiefly by the exertions of their civil rulers.

The land which was fit for the reception of Christ's doctrine without having been enriched with the blood of its martyrs, Ireland, alone, among the nations clung to the Faith through good report, and through evil report, unflinchingly and undeviatingly. No bribes allured her people, no persecutions terrified them, no privations could shake their constancy, no bitter humiliations could shame them into a denial of their religion. Though for upward of two centuries, they were as a flock without a shepherd, yet did they never waver in their fidelity. Though there was no court of Inquisition established there to check false and dangerous teachings, and though there were no pains and penalties appointed there to coerce men to save their souls, (when passion had made them deaf to the greater punishment that God denounces upon heresy and infidelity,) still were the Irish people faithful,—still did they cleave to the teachings of St. Patrick—still were they, what they are to-day, the one nation, that manifested true chivalry, true loyalty to God and conscience and truth,

in the maintenance of a principle diametrically opposed to what the world calls—self-interest!

What need is there, dear friends, to rehearse the mournful story of wrong and persecution, which has been Ireland's history for ages? The whole world has heard it and is familiar with it, yet the tale is ever new, and mankind will listen with sympathy again and again to the wail of suffering Erin, until some measure of justice be done her in God's good time.

I have already said, that Ireland received the faith in the first instance without shedding the blood of a single martyr, and this is one of the chief glories of the Emerald Isle. But a day was yet to dawn, when the Irish people were to become a nation of martyrs and confessors of the Faith. The ingenuity of the most cruel tyrants was exhausted to invent methods of torture for them, and never did human malice go farther to effect the destruction of a nation, and the eradication of every noble sentiment and every cherished principle, than in the case of Ireland. Every instrument of torture that was ever devised, every appliance of bodily pain and mental anguish was made use of to turn her people away from the faith of their fathers: *the rack, the gibbet, the halter, the triangle, the lash*, these were the strong arguments England had recourse to; first, to show them what treason they were guilty of in being Irish, and second, what an unpardonable sin they committed in being staunch Catholics. The letting loose among them of a licentious and fanatical soldiery, the suborning of false witnesses, the bribing of

informers, all the inducements of wealth and position, that can be held out to a child to betray his parents and kinsfolk,—all these things were tried in turn, to the end that they might shake the constancy of the Irish people.

The rightful possessors of the soil were driven from the holdings their forefathers had possessed from time immemorial. They were proscribed and outlawed as felons; their lands were alienated to their inhuman oppressors. All the avenues of wealth and honorable station were barred against them. Discontent was fostered amongst them—one day, to ripen into open revolt and rebellion—that their tyrants might have, at least, a shadow of excuse for unsheathing the sword against them, and utterly exterminating them, root and branch. Nay, even knowledge and learning were forbidden them under extreme penalties, whether sought at home or abroad. Of course, the exercise of the duties of their holy religion was denied them by every exquisite refinement of despotism. Then, was the minister of religion pursued like a hunted deer, and chased from one obscure hiding-place to another. No pen can describe the horrors of the worse than demoniacal persecution to which Ireland and her unhappy children were subjected. In a word, the attempt was made to utterly brutalize the people, so that, since they would not live and embrace an heretical creed, (their utter abhorrence,) they should die the death of dogs, to the delight of their persecutors and the infernal demons.

But, in vain was all this savagery of our enemies against the stout hearts of our ancestors in those darkest days of

Ireland's history. In vain, too, were all the allurements held out to them to change their faith. That long-protracted and bloody crusade was barren of victory over Ireland's loyalty to faith and truth in the past, even as it is cursed with a like barrenness to this present day. We have seen that noble people pallid and famishing, walking the earth in the semblance of skeletons, *anatomies of death* rather than living men, from the wasting of hunger and from the violence of fever generated by sore famine,—whilst the alienate the bread that should rather sustain the life of the faithful people;—whilst a hated, hireling, foreign hierarchy,—no, I will not call *the thing a priesthood*, for a priesthood which, with the right to the divine Sacrifice, has lost the divine impulse of compassion for human grief and suffering, and whose daily bread is the fruit of injustice and extortion, is no longer a priesthood—yes, whilst that un-Irish, that un-Christian body, called the Established Church in Ireland, mocked at our extreme woe, or only added insult to injury by offering us bread on base conditions—that we would consent to play false to conscience, and commit the sin of Judas against our Lord!

Again I ask, has the world ever witnessed a sublime constancy like this of the Irish people? Contrary to all human expectation and all human experience, the faith prospered—or rather, the afflicted people clung to their God, to their religion more firmly than ever. And are we not now prepared, dear friends, to meet, unmoved,—rather let me say with pity—the sneer of the scoffer, the derision of the

infidel, who know not, nor care to know, that the highest glory of a man, or of a nation, is *fidelity to God?* We, who are the representatives in this age of a long line of glorious martyrs and confessors of the faith—shall I say it?—*the remnant of a nation of martyrs;* we, who have parted with much that men hold dear, out of loyalty to principle, loyalty to religion,—God helping, we cannot be deterred from persevering steadfastly to the end, in spite of the stupid gibes and taunts of ignorant heretics and unbelievers.

They say that our confidence is visionary and baseless! They tell us that our faith is not worth the sacrifice! They assert that God cannot approve of this voluntary self-annihilation of a nation for conscience's sake. They declare that it were better to advance with the age, than to preserve intact the faith handed down to us by our fathers! But, thanks be to God! so have we never been taught! Thanks be to God! so have we never believed! The law as *we* read it, runs thus: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with all thy strength.” That first of all. The rest will follow in good season: for, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all things else shall be added unto you,” is the word of Eternal Truth which can never, never fail. The Irish nation had the choice proposed to them—*deny your faith, or prepare for the worst!* They rejected with scorn the insulting proposal! Ireland spurned the alluring bribe, and *the alternative* was hers! Then it was that the sword of persecution entered her loving,

devoted soul. But she was unconquered, then, as she is unconquered still. Yes, she is even now victorious, though she staked all and lost all in the contest, save only her honor and her faith; whilst the victor lost honor, and shall, please God, lose all his conquests as well, in that day, when the divine promise comes to be fulfilled in favor of poor Erin: "The meek shall possess the land."

When the Jews, after having crucified our Lord, beheld him hanging on the cruel Tree of Golgotha, they mocked and scoffed at him, saying: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." He had put himself into their savage hands to work their pleasure upon him; it was their hour, and the power of darkness. So, when the Irish nation had been for centuries subjected to the extremity of such a fierce persecution, that the very features of its sons were changed by reason of the sharpness of the long agony; when the lineal descendants of kings and valiant chieftains, whose names adorn the pages of history, took on the appearance of an inferior race; when the open brow, and brave glance, and laughing eye of the light-hearted Celt were depressed, dimmed, defaced; when the fiery ardor of Gaelic nature was repressed, stamped out; when the shackles of servitude had changed the proud, soldierly step of the freeman into the shambling gait of the slave; when the most excellent gifts that God Almighty bestows in the order of nature—comely person, intelligence, wit, capacity for learning, generous heart, fiery valor, fidelity to trust and to plighted faith, abundant gayety, and wealth of humor,—

when all these noble qualities were blighted and almost crushed out by centuries of cruel wrong; and, when, in their stead, too often, the vices of serfdom and slavery asserted themselves, then, O just heaven! then, as the Jews taunted our Blessed Lord upon Mount Calvary, so were *we* taunted with our defects, with our wounds, with our deformities, by the very men who had nailed us to our cross. It was said, (nay, it is still said): “Lo, to what an extremity of misery and wretchedness has their faith reduced them!” Wretched, indeed, and deplorable is the condition to which that beautiful land, so bountifully endowed by God, has been reduced! But we affirm without fear of contradiction, that Ireland is not fairly chargeable with this. We cry out to the oppressors of our beloved land: “Behold the work of your hands, and tremble!”

If the darkness of ignorance has, in a measure, superseded the light of knowledge in our unhappy isle, it was *you* that extinguished the torch of science; it was *you* that prohibited learning, and suppressed schools, and outlawed the school-master. If public spirit is well-nigh dead among our people and a healthy national pride almost vanished from the land, none but *you*, the foes of Erin, are to blame. If some of the vices of the Helot disfigure the national character, it was *you*, our oppressors, that sowed their pernicious seeds in one of the fairest soils of God’s earth. If the people are restless and turbulent now, and incapable of being benefited by anything that England can do for them, it was *you* that caused them to mistrust and dislike *you*. It was *you* that

Look their elasticity of spirit, so that now they scarce have the nerve to arise and throw off their shackles, though you should in good earnest bid them go and be free, though you should declare them, before the world, independent of your odious tyranny. Even your gifts and concessions, they have learned by the bitter experience of the past, to fear and to suspect.

The depressing and debasing effects of long ages of servitude can not be effaced in a day; no, not even if the oppressor were sincerely willing to deal leniently and generously with his victims unto the end of time. There is even reason to fear that our race has, to some extent, irremediably deteriorated through adverse circumstances. Alas, poor land! Island of sorrow! They have wrought their will upon thee! The only glory that remains for thee at present, is the fame of thy constancy and of thine heroic preservation of the true faith of Jesus Christ!

But surely, the Almighty will not be unmindful of his mercies forever. Surely, my dear friends, he must have a glorious future in store for the faithful Island of Saints. She has conferred countless benefits on many nations, and surely the blessing of the Most High must, one day, be hers. The infinite justice of God will grant her, yet, a glorious deliverance from all the ills that oppress her, to-day. In the darkest hour of our affliction, we shall not be without hope; and the bard of Ireland only gives utterance to the universal sentiment of the nation, when he sings:

“The nations have fallen, but thou still art young,  
Thy sun is but rising, when others are set;  
And tho’ Slavery’s cloud o’er thy morning hath hung,  
The full moon of Freedom shall beam round thee yet,  
Erin! O Erin! though long in the shade,  
Thy star will shine out when the proudest shall fade.”

But I care not what reward may be in store for Ireland (and may it be exceeding great, in proportion to her unequalled, chivalrous fidelity!) it still cannot surpass the glory which she derives from her constancy in the faith of Christ, handed down from age to age through a splendid line of apostles, martyrs, confessors, holy men, and saintly women. O sons and daughters of Erin! let us be careful not to prove ourselves unworthy descendants of so noble an ancestry, but let us strive by the bravery and purity of our life and conduct, to reflect credit upon our heroic sires. A wise son is his father’s glory.

And I tell you, Irishmen, that it can not be well or wise, at this late day, to disparage the religion of Ireland, to regard it as a hindrance to her prosperity, in any sense wherein prosperity is desirable and honorable. It cannot be well or wise to despise the ministers of that holy religion, and lead others to despise them. I speak not to cold materialists here to-day, I speak to the scions of illustrious confessors of the faith, to men who have imbibed from infancy the traditions of heavenly truth. I speak to men who know that the Church is divine, the Faith divine. And I ask you: Is this the time to entertain cold, unworthy suspicions of that Church which your fathers so loved and prized, that

they preferred to die rather than abandon it? The fiercest part of the struggle for the maintenance of the faith in Ireland is now over. Heresy seems tottering to its fall, seeking to drag down with it to the abyss even such broken and distorted fragments of the truth as still remain to it, and threatening to involve in a total ruin the belief and hopes of mankind. The entire religious world is in a ferment; and it is now the imperative duty of all who love God and are loyal to truth and to the highest duty, to stand firm to their principles and to the faith of Jesus Christ. Will you listen at this time to the deceiver who would alienate you from your duty, by causing you to entertain suspicions against your holy Mother, the Church? You cannot misapprehend my meaning. There is a deplorable spirit of suspicion and fault-finding abroad amongst us, which must be repressed, or else you lose for yourselves and your posterity, the glory that your ancestors acquired for you at every cost of blood and treasure. It is an unmanly spirit. It is an unchristian spirit. And sooner than Erin should be freed from her shackles by the destruction of our Catholic faith and the dissolution of those ties of affection, confidence, and reverence which bind together in Ireland, more closely than in other lands, the priest and his faithful people,—sooner than *that*, O my dear friends, I am sure that every true Irishman of Christian belief and feeling, would fervently exclaim: "*Welcome, chains and torments! Welcome, everlasting slavery!*"

You, of the Irish race, could have had wealth, and home

government, and commerce, and manufactures, at any time during the past three hundred years, if your sires had consented to abandon the faith. But those heroic ones who went before you, spurned the infamous proposal. They put into your hands, Irishmen, (wherever your lot might be cast,) the honor of our beautiful Isle, untarnished by a single speck of dishonor or shame! “*Semper et ubique fidelis,—always and every where faithful*” was the inscription on the flag of the Irish brigade in France, and under that legend was inscribed a long list of glorious names. They were the names of the victories that Irish valor had achieved for “the Eldest Daughter of the Church.” That same motto is indelibly inscribed on Ireland’s national escutcheon. Bear it well in mind, my dear Irish friends: “Always and every where faithful.” You dare not erase that motto from your country’s shield: “Every where and always faithful.” Even the blessed boon of freedom and national prosperity, gained under any other motto, were an accursed, polluted thing!

Blessed be God! however, in the old and faithful isle all the signs of the times seem to indicate an approaching surcease of misfortune. Her merciless tormentor is no longer the arbiter of nations, no longer the mistress of the sea, as once she was. Her dominion and influence are sensibly declining. She dare not go to war, to-day, with any first-class power of the earth, for well she knows that the exiled Irish in the onset of lawful battle would soon thrust at her throat the two-edged sword of a long-delayed, but victorious, vengeance. Disintegration of her political fabric is imminent,

and the forces which will rend her boasted Constitution to tatters, are only temporally controlled and held in check; but, before long, they will assuredly spurn restraint, and, then, crushing with irresistible violence the frail barriers of an artificial aristocracy and puppet-royalty, they will restore to Ireland her own; and it may be, perhaps, proclaim England, at last, as just, as once she was mighty.

Ireland's struggle is the longest and fiercest fight on the records of the world's history. All mankind acknowledge that we have fought valiantly, and that God approves. We still live, we still display the same courage as ever before. The heart of the Irish patriot beats still as strongly as ever for the cause of his beloved land; but amid all his trials and disappointments, he cherishes the sweet, soul-inspiring prophecy of Ireland's favorite bard, and he does not forget that:

“Unchilled by the rain, and unwak'd by the wind,  
The lily lies sleeping thro' winter's cold hour,  
Till the hand of the spring her dark chain unbind,  
And daylight and liberty bless the young flower.  
Erin! O Erin! *thy* winter is past,  
And the hope that liv'd thro' it shall blossom at last!”

J. F.

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## SECOND FRIDAY IN LENT.

## II. WHAT AWAITS YOU?

*"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

*Hebr. 10: 31.*

Have you heard, my dear brethren, these words of the Apostle: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God?" Ponder upon them with me, to-day, I implore you, for "his wrath no man can resist," Job 9: 13; and the arrows of his vengeance destroy all against whom they are directed. But who, (you ask,) will fall into the hands of the living God? He who departs this life in the state of mortal sin. O what a great evil is sin! Its black deformity was clearly set before you in my last discourse. I hope, then, you have complied with my request, and (never suffering those salutary thoughts to depart from your memories,) that you have pondered seriously upon the important subject. What have you done? You have forsaken your God, your loving and powerful Creator, to whom so many and such holy bonds bind you, and to whom you have so often vowed fidelity. . . . What have you done? You have offended your God, your wise and amiable Redeemer who shed the last drop of his blood for you upon the cruel cross. You have sinned against the Holy Spirit, the great and good God, who has loaded you with inspirations and graces. . . . And now *what awaits you* in punishment of your infidelity, your disobedience, your malice? Think well on it, before it be too late. God must punish you; he is bound by his eternal Law to render to every man according to the works which he has done in the flesh, whether good or evil. What, then, awaits you for your sinful works?

- I. The judgment of an angry God,*
- II. The hell of an avenging God.*

The Eternal Lord and Law-giver will, nay, *must* enter into judgment with his offending creature. His outraged mercy demands the arraignment of the criminal at the bar of his infinite justice. Behold, then, O sinner, what awaits you: The judgment of an angry God. But what kind of a judgment is this? A judgment so terrible that its horrors, my brethren, are far beyond and above all human conception.

a) It is the judgment of an *infinitely holy God*. The Seraphim cried one to another, and said: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of his glory." Is. 6: 3. Being a God of infinite purity and holiness, he detests every sin in his innermost essence, and with an everlasting hatred: "Thou art not a God that willest iniquity, neither shall the wicked dwell near thee; nor shall the unjust abide before thy eyes. Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity; thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie. The bloody and the deceitful man the Lord will abhor." Ps. 5: 5-7. And you, O sinner, standing in judgment before this holy God,—what shall he see in your heart, in your life? Alas! how many stains, and spots, and indelible brands of hell! He sees your injustices, your adulteries, your drunkenness, your mortal sins against Charity, your sacrilegious Communions. The infinitely holy God sees all the crimes which you have committed from the dawn of reason up to this very hour. His angry gaze rests upon you,—you are doomed already to hell; the sentence is pronounced; you are, as it were, on your way to the place of execution,—the mercy of God, alone, stays for a little while the descending sword of his avenging justice. He can destroy you, body and soul, at any moment. Can you, then, be so careless, so indifferent, in the face of such momentous risks?

b. *An omniscient God will judge you.* Before an earthly judge you may sometimes succeed in concealing certain damaging circumstances,—and what you cannot conceal you may be able to palliate or excuse. But this, my brethren, is not possible before the all-knowing Judge. "Man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart." (1. Kings, 16: 7.) Yes, God beholds the heart, and he beholds it with the eyes of a God. "The eyes of the Lord are brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts." (Eccl. 23: 28.) And you, sinner, are in judgment before this omniscient God! His eye penetrates the most secret folds, the inmost recesses of your soul. All those bad thoughts and sinful actions which you have concealed from every human eye, all those corrupt desires which you have buried in the depths of your own bosom, are open and manifest before him, as though they were written on the unclouded sky with the beams of the meridian sun. How infinite, then, must be your shame and confusion before him!

c) *An inexorable God will judge you.* The time of mercy is passed, the measure of grace is exhausted to its dregs. Hence, God is inexorable in his vengeance. "You shall seek me, and shall not find me." John 7: 34. And you, O sinner, are in judgment before this inexorable Judge! Alas! what must be the feelings of a criminal when, in answer to his last petition for pardon, the terrible reply is given: "There is no pardon but with God!" Who will be able to describe the emotions of the weeping sinner, before

the throne of God, when he clasps his hands in anguish and with torrents of tears implores mercy,—but obtains no mercy! O, how dreadful, dear Christians, is the judgment of an enraged God! Add to this, yet another circumstance which draws down more heavily still the fatal scales of divine justice.

2. *The judgment of that hour is forever decisive and irrevocable.* Whatever sentence the eternal Judge pronounces upon the offender remains pronounced for all eternity. From his sentence there is

a) *No appeal.* Here upon earth, a criminal may protest against the sentence pronounced upon him, and appeal to a higher court. It is only when the Supreme Court of the land has spoken, that no further appeal is possible. . . . It is very different, my brethren, in the Court of divine justice. There speaks the King of kings, (1. Tim. 6: 15); there speaks one most high, Creator Almighty, a powerful king, and greatly to be feared, who sitteth upon his throne. (Eccles 1: 8.) It is the Supreme Court of heaven that decides, and from its verdict there is no appeal. And as from the sentence of that divine Judge there is no appeal, so in the sentence itself there is

b) *No change, no shadow of alteration.* God judges, and his judgment becomes an eternal one. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever." Ps. 32: 11. "The will of the Lord shall stand firm." Prov. 19: 21. Therefore, there can be no alteration of the sentence. Let the victim of divine justice suffer the most intense and bitter agony, let his indescribable misery endure from century to century, the sentence of condemnation, once passed, abides forever, and will never be alleviated for the space of a single moment. "If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be." Eccles 11: 3.

All this awaits you, O sinner! in the judgment of an enraged God. . . . You may doubt, or, perhaps, even discredit it; you may banish the thought of the judgment for a season from your mind; you may run from pleasure to pleasure, you may make yourself, for the time being, blind and deaf to the terrors which await you, but whether you prepare for it or not, the hour will come when you shall stand alone and defenceless before the throne of your God. "Every one of us shall render account for himself to God." Rom. 14: 12. "We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Rom. 14: 10. "When one departs this life, he shall forthwith be placed before the judgment-seat of God, and the most searching scrutiny will be made of all things which he has ever thought, spoken, or done." St. Aug. lib. 2, *De anima*, cap. 4.

II. Mortal sin is so great an evil that it deserves painful and eternal punishment. And such a punishment is really inflicted upon the sinner. God punishes him

1. *With a hell full of torment.* And the torment of hell is twofold:

a) *The torment of the gnawing worm.* The Prophet speaks of a worm which gnaws in the heart of the damned: "Their worm shall never die." Our divine Saviour repeats the same words: "Their worm dieth not." Mark. 9: 47. If a worm were generated in your heart, my brethren, eating into its very core day and night, what exquisite pain would it not produce? In the heart of the damned there lives a very poisonous worm, which continually gnaws the soul with its sharp teeth,—this is the worm of conscience, bitter remorse. It continually says: "What have you lost, O sinner? Into what infinite misery have you not plunged yourself! You might so easily have been a child of everlasting salvation, and, now, you are, forevermore, a child of infernal perdition!" The Fathers of the Church declare, that the torment of the gnawing worm is very painful. St. Bernard says: "This is the worm that never dies, the memory of past things. It never ceases to gnaw at the conscience, and, nourished by this indigestible food, it continues its life. I shudder at this biting worm and everlasting death. I shudder to fall into the hands of the living death and of the dying life!"

b. *The torment of the devouring fire.* "Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Is. 23: 14. "The end of them is a flame of fire." Eccles 21: 10. "I am tormented in this flame." Luke 16: 24. "He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone." Apoc. 14: 10. "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Matt. 25: 41. "The chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Luke 3: 17. "The Angels shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." Matt. 13: 50. The Fathers of the Church use similar language. "There will not be so small a fire as burns upon your hearth-stone, and if any one would compel you to put your hand into it, you would rather give him anything than put your hand therein." St. Augustine in Ps. 49. "As often as I look at the earthly fire, I think of the fire of hell, and cannot sufficiently bewail the miserable condition of the damned." St. John Climachus in *scal. par. grad 4.* Behold, O sinner! this hell of torments awaits you, and it is

2. *A hell without end.* The enraged God said of old to his faithless people: "I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame which shall never be forgotten." Jer. 23: 40. The Eternal Truth has declared that his sentence to the reprobate at the Last Day shall be: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Matt. 25: 41. "The smoke of their torments," says the Revelation of St. John, "shall ascend up for ever and ever." Apoc. 14: 11. We all know, my brethren, that a certain sort of fire was created to serve the use of man in his necessities,

but, alas ! it is quite another sort of fire which serves the justice of God in his vengeance. The latter, unlike the former, does not consume what it burns, it continually restores what it feeds upon. No wonder, then, that those terrible and insatiable flames must burn for ever. Eternal will be the fire since eternal is its fuel,—the soul of the sinner and his unremitted sin.

O most dreadful of all truths ! The judgment of an angry God and the hell of an avenging God, alike, await the sinner . . . This is the reward; or rather punishment of his momentary delights, his base brief joys, his loathsome, short-lived pleasures . . . This is your portion, O poor deluded ones, who disregard God and his holy law, who stretch out your hands to grasp the goods of others, who shamelessly dishonor your bodies by lust and carnal excesses. This your portion and inheritance, O drunkard, O proud man, O profligate father, O godless son ! Fly, before it be too late, from the wrath to come; and, having immediate recourse to the tribunal of infinite mercy, seek by a sincere repentance to avert from your souls the irrevocable sentence of infinite justice, that you may never know how dreadful a thing it is “to fall into the hands of the living God.” A blessing which, from my heart, I wish you in the name of the adorable Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE IMITATION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

*“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.”*  
*Matt. 17: 5.*

These, my dear brethren, are the words of the Eternal Father, speaking from the clouds of heaven to Peter and James and John, when Jesus on Mount Thabor manifested himself to those three disciples in the splendor of his glory: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” These words are, also, addressed, dear Christians, to you and me. We must hear his words with reverence and follow his example with fidelity. What does he teach us by his words,—by his sacred instructions? That sublime doctrine which it concerns all nations and all individuals to know; the foundation and corner-stone, as it were, of the whole Gospel—and which is this: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” What does he teach us by his example? That we cannot arrive at the possession of his glory—that glory in which he once revealed himself so resplendently to his disciples on Mount Thabor, unless we first follow him, bearing the yoke of the cross to Mount Calvary, and endeavoring to die to the world and its vanities, to the flesh and its concupiscences. Had not Christ to suffer and so to enter into glory? If you wish to become sharers of his glory in heaven, dear brethren, be sure, now, to be partakers of his shame and suffering on earth. Jesus Christ Crucified is your Lord and Master: hence, you must follow him in the way of the cross; the servant is no better than the Master. And why, besides, must you follow him?

- I. *Because he commands you to follow him, and,*
- II. *Because at your baptism you promised to follow him.*

I. St. Peter says: “Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps.” 1. Pet. 2: 21. Christ enjoins on all his disciples this following of his footsteps: “I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.” John 13: 15. During his whole life, from beginning to end, Christ gives us examples of virtues which we should strive to imitate.

I. He is a model of *poverty*; a lesson and reproach to those who strive after riches; he is born in a stable, in the most abject poverty; a little hay

or straw in a poor manger, is his comfortless bed; a few rags, his only covering. He grows up, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow in the humble carpenter-shop of his foster father. He begins his public career; he travels on foot from city to city, from village to village, carrying “neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes;” he has nothing, and desires nothing. His usual food is barley bread, sometimes a fish or some fruit; his raiment a coat, woven by the hands of his blessed Mother; he has no bed, he owns no house; he sleeps wherever night overtakes him,—now in the field, now on a mountain, sometimes, in the house of a friend. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air, nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Luke 9: 58. He dies, and dies poor as he had lived. In the solemn moment of dissolution, he had nothing of his own to bequeath to his afflicted and desolate Mother, no lands, no houses, neither real nor personal property, absolutely nothing,—he breathes his last breath upon the Cross, destitute and naked, stript even of his one poor garment,—teaching us by his example, that we should renounce all our possessions for love of him, or, at least, disengage our hearts from the things of this world, if we wish to be his disciples.

2. He is an example of *humility*. He despises honors and dignities, bears contumelies and derisions; he consents to be regarded “as one struck by God and afflicted,”—as a leper—“as a worm and no man,”—a stern rebuke to those who love and seek preferment. He never spoke of his royal extraction; he never sought the society of the great ones of this world, unless invited by them or for their salvation; he was fond of conversing or communing with the poor; he shrank with horror from the honors and praises of men, from the empty plaudits of the world. “Learn of me,” he said, “because I am humble and meek of heart;” and again “Blessed are the poor in spirit (*i. e.* the humble): for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” When, one day, the people sought to make him king, he fled into a mountain alone. Once, indeed, he entered the city of Jerusalem in a sort of ephemeral triumph, but with what splendor was he attended? “Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.” He was mounted upon that despicable animal, in the midst of a shouting concourse of low and common people. Was not this a triumph of humility? What derisions, what insults, what scornful outrages, did he not receive from the Pharisees and high priests! What mockery, what inhuman treatment did he not experience during his Passion, from Herod and from the Roman soldiery! They clothed him with a white garment, jeering the Eternal Wisdom as a fool; they struck him, plucked out his beard, spat in his face, crowned him as a mock king, condemned him to death as a malefactor, and, even when he hung agonizing and expiring on the cross, they scoffed at his divine power and his miracles. Was there ever such an excess of pure and unadulterated humiliation? O, my brethren,

let us cry out with St. Bernard to our outraged Redeemer: "The more I behold thee abased and humbled for love of me, the dearer thou art, O blessed Lord, to me!"

3. He is an example of *patience* in the most painful sufferings, a continual reproof to those so-called Christians, who seem to exist for no other purpose than the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. On that Maunday-Thursday night, when he began his sacred Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane, what nameless pains did he not endure with the strongest fortitude, and patience, pains which pierced, like a two-edged sword, alike through flesh and spirit! He trembled with anguish, and nearly swooned away under the accumulated weight of man's iniquities, laid upon him as the Saving Victim of the world; instead of sweat, large drops of blood issued from all the pores of his body, forced outward from his oppressed Heart by the unspeakable tortures which he endured. He bore all silently and with indescribable patience. He rebuked his disciples if they manifested any desire for retaliation; and he prayed constantly for his enemies, who ceased not to persecute him till they had scourged him, crowned him with thorns, nailed him to the cross, and seen him die on it between two thieves.

Why all this, O Crucified Jesus?—we ask of him in deepest reverence and love. And the answer comes down to us, my brethren, from the Garden of Mount Olivet, from the judgment-halls of Annas, Caiphas, and Herod, from the Praetorium of Pilate, yea, from the topmost heights of Golgotha. "I have given you an example, that as I have done, you do also." Thus it is that Christ hath suffered for us, and left us an example, that we should follow his steps. But, you must not believe, dear Christians, that this following of a crucified Redeemer is merely optional and of counsel,—or that it is simply a matter of supererogation to follow him in the path of suffering and self-denial. Not only has he given us an example to admire, but it is the earnest will and the express command of our Lord, (which we are bound to obey,) that, if we would enter heaven, we must follow him in the way of the cross, no matter how hard and painful it may appear to flesh and blood. I assure you, dear friends, there is no other way for us to enter into Paradise save that which Jesus has traced out for us by his blood; no other way, but the way of mortification and self-denial, or, as Thomas à Kempis calls it, "the king's highway of the holy cross." Hear the threat of the Son of God: "He, that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me." Matt. 10: 38. And again, he says: "I am the door. If any one enter by me, he shall be saved." John 10: 9. Now, what is it, to enter by Christ as through a door? It is nothing else than to follow Christ's example, to go the same way, which he went,—the painful way of the cross.

This is, therefore, my dear brethren, not merely a counsel, but a strict

command. He that will enter into life, must do three things: *He must deny himself,—he must take up his cross,—he must follow Jesus.*

Have you heard it, my brethren? Do you understand it? Christ commands you to deny yourselves, to conquer yourselves. You have, perchance, an inordinate passion, you have a strong desire or inclination to a certain sin; this is that inward law of concupiscence which, according to the Apostle, fights against the law of the spirit. We all feel this ignoble rebellion in our members; alas! it is a fatal and inevitable consequence of original sin. This law you must despise, these passions you must subdue, these inclinations you must curb and control. Besides all this, you must take up your cross. Every one has a certain cross to carry;—for one, it is heavy,—for another, light. The rich man must carry his individual cross as well as the poor man, the master as well as the servant, the king as well as the beggar. All human existence is marked with the sign of the cross. Sickness is a cross, poverty is a cross, afflictions and calamities of every description, are crosses. Take, then, your cross upon your shoulders, dear Christians, not in anger or ill will, but in submissive patience; not in stubbornness or rebellion, but with meek resignation to the adorable will of God. Take up your cross, and follow your poor, humble, suffering Lord in his own royal way of poverty, humility, and mortification.

A brave general once led a strong force of infantry against the enemy. To execute successfully a certain strategic design, everything depended upon the swiftness of their movements; he, therefore, commanded the soldiers to quicken their pace, and follow him. The march was long,—the road rough. One soldier, almost exhausted with fatigue, and tired of the continual exhortation to the troops to quicken their pace, turned, at last, to the general, and broke forth with: “It is easy for *you* to talk; you are sitting at your ease upon a horse, but *we* must make this tiresome march on foot!” What did the general reply to this unexpected rebuke? Nothing,—but he alighted from his saddle, took out his revolver, and shooting his horse dead upon the spot, he exclaimed: “Come now, my men, let us march on together!” Wonderful was the effect of this act upon his dispirited men; they forgot their fatigue, and following in the wake of their heroic general, they rushed on to victory. Why does not the example of our leader, Jesus Christ, produce the same effects upon his cowardly followers? He descended from the heights of infinite majesty, he quitted his glorious throne in heaven, and came down upon our sinful earth; he assumed the form of a servant, he traveled the rough road of the cross before us, marking every step of the way with his precious blood,—will we, then, dear Christians, pusillanimously refuse to follow him? Will we be faithless servants, and abandon him? Nay, then, do you forget that we are bound to follow him? Do you no longer remember your baptismal vows, those sacred and irrevocable promises you made to God and all his Saints, when the saving waters were poured upon your brow?

II. In Baptism you bound yourself by a solemn oath to renounce forever the devil and his works, the world and its pomps, the flesh and its concupiscences; you promised faithfully to serve Christ Crucified, as your rightful Master, and to walk in his foot-prints along the way of the cross to Calvary. At a later date, at your first Communion, and frequently during life, you renewed this promise; moreover, in all your confessions, (if they were properly made,) you explicitly repeated this promise; you renewed it, again and again, in the presence of God and of all his Angels and Saints. If you forget that solemn vow, do you suppose that God will, also, forget it? On that most terrible of days when the Lord shall come to judge the living and the dead, he will rigorously examine whether and how you have kept your solemn promise. Therefore, be always mindful of your words, and let your promise, solemnly made, never escape your memory. Think of your duty as a Christian, and never, I implore of you, dare to do anything contrary to your sacred obligations. Far from you be the spirit of the world, and all attachment to dangerous associates; far from you be the devil and all his works, the flesh and all its concupiscences, which you once renounced in holy baptism!

Frequently ponder, my dear brethren, on those words of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians: "As many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ." (3: 27.) What does this mean? It means, that in baptism we have put on not only the garment of sanctifying grace, not only the faith, law, and doctrine of Christ, but, (in a certain sense,) the personality of Christ himself. We have put on, as it were, his spirit, his virtues, his holiness, with the obligation to reflect the life of Christ in our conduct by a faithful imitation of the Divine Original, so that our conduct, our life, may be a living image and likeness of his spotless sanctity.

When any one enters into a Religious Order and takes the habit, he is obliged to observe the rules of his Order, to endeavor to imitate the virtues of its Founder. How much more, then, are we who have put on not only the habit of Christ, but Christ himself, obliged to follow our heavenly Teacher, the Author and Founder of our Faith, and to imitate him in his poverty and his humility, in his patience, and love of the Cross? It would be preposterous, not to say revolting to every pious feeling, if a Religious, instead of putting on his poor habit daily, were to array himself in a richly-embroidered garment, more adapted to the stage than to a Monastery or Convent. Would it not, then, be still more preposterous and revolting in a Christian so far to forget himself and his profession, as to cast off the sacred garment which he put on at his baptism, (vowing to retain it to the end of his life,)—and, to the scandal of his brethren, to appear among them in the sumptuous robes of sensuality and pride? In the early ages of the Church, the white garment, the emblem of innocence, with which those who came forth from baptism had been clothed, was carefully preserved, and if a Christian in time of persecution yielding to the

torture, denied his faith,—the baptismal garment, to his shame, was laid at his feet. It is not necessary in these our days, my brethren, to preserve the white garment in which your sponsors bore you to the saving Font,—look only upon Jesus Christ whom you have put on in your baptism, yes, look upon him when you deny your faith, if not in word, at least in work,—overcome not by tortures and persecution, as those ancient Christians were, but by compliance with the desires of your corrupt heart, alone,—look at Jesus Christ Crucified, and blush for shame.

By the mercy of God you are Christians and disciples of that Crucified Redeemer. Should you not, then, follow in his steps? Most assuredly, the example of a God-Man, humbled and impoverished for love of us, teaches his servants to divest themselves of all things in order to follow him. “The charity of Christ presseth us;” and his followers, despising all the grandeur and pomp of this world, should desire nothing more ardently than to be despised by the world in order to resemble Jesus Christ. His example deserves that his adherents, despising all sensual pleasures, should seek nothing else than by fasting, mortification, and self-denial, to carry in their bodies the mortification of their Crucified Saviour. But he does not even demand that much, he is satisfied with less. Alas! how far are Christians removed from the perfection of their divine Model! “See, you make all things according to the pattern shown you upon the Mount,” was said of old to Moses. And shall we fail to imitate *our* Pattern on Mount Calvary? The divine Victim hangs naked on the cross,—his wicked servants desire to be rich, and endeavor to become rich, even by fraud and injustice. The Lord Jesus is stripped even of his necessary garments,—yet, his unfaithful followers display themselves in vain and costly dresses, often far above their state of life and beyond their limited means. The Lord Jesus is hungry and thirsty,—yet, his false servants feast sumptuously, at the banquets of sinners, rioting day and night in gluttony and drunkenness.

Alexander the Great once said to a cowardly soldier named Alexander: “Change either your name or your conduct.” Let us, then, in future, my brethren, be Christians, not in name, but in deed; let us be followers of Christ in reality. Let us imitate him in his poverty, in his humility, in his mortification and patience,—imitate him, in short, in all those sublime virtues of which he has given us such splendid examples. If we thus imitate Christ Crucified here on earth in his virtues,—if we share lovingly and cheerfully in all his humiliations and sufferings,—we will surely follow him into the kingdom of his glory and enjoy with him those pure and everlasting delights which he has prepared for those that love him. Amen.

A. W.

**SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.****THE CONDUCT OF JESUS TOWARDS HIS APOSTLES.**

*Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart. Matt. 17: 1.*

The subject of this day's Gospel, my dear brethren, is the glorious transfiguration of our Lord on Mount Thabor, in the presence of his Apostles Peter, James, and John, whereby he showed them a figure and a glimpse of that endless happiness which, after the trials and labors of this mortal life, awaits the servants of God in the heavenly kingdom. Peter was so enamored with that vision of his Master's glory, that he could not contain himself, but exclaimed: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." The transfiguration of the God-Man lasted but a few brief moments; yet, that passing brilliancy which illumined the Sacred Humanity of Christ, had such an effect upon the chief of the Apostles, that he despised all earthly pleasures, and, regarding the world with scorn and disdain, he was ready to part with every thing in it, provided he were permitted to remain in holy contemplation on the Mount. But the hour of heavenly consolation must be purchased for the Christian by a long season of cruel suffering, of struggle, and humiliation. Peter must descend from Mount Thabor; he must go with his afflicted Master, first to Mount Olivet, and afterwards to Mount Calvary, and, at length, he must hang agonizing on the cross, like his divine Model, before he can enter with him into the mansions of permanent rest and peace. The Church reminds us in the Gospel of this day of the heavenly glory which awaits us; she encourages us, like an heroic mother, to fight the good fight against Satan and the world, to mortify ourselves, and to do penance. If we follow our Lord in his warfare with Satan and the world, we shall be made partakers of his glory; for he plainly intimates to us by his example, that we are to encounter temptations and to overcome them, and that the way to glory lies through humiliations and trials, and the hardships of the spiritual camp.—Another reason why the Church presents to us the Gospel of this day, is to show us how amiable was the conduct of Jesus towards his Apostles; how solicitous he was to strengthen their belief in his Divinity, to the end that they might not be scandalized in him in the days of his humiliation and Passion. For this reason, my brethren, I shall speak to you, to-day, of the amiable conduct of Jesus towards his Apostles, that we, also, may learn how to conduct ourselves towards our fellow-men. Let us, then, consider

- I. *The conduct of Jesus towards his Apostles, and*
- II. *How we are to conduct ourselves towards our fellow-men.*

I. One day, a doctor of the law came to our Lord, asking him: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus answered, saying: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like to this. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Matt. 22: 37-39. Charity, therefore, is constituted by the divine Wisdom and the Eternal Truth, the great commandment of the law; that is, the twofold love of God and of the neighbor. Now, when the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity came down from heaven, and became incarnate upon earth, in order to show us by his own example how we are to serve God, can any one doubt for a moment that he, the Word made flesh, has perfectly fulfilled this first and great commandment? Ah! no, my dear brethren, his love for God was clearly manifested in his conduct towards his heavenly Father, and his love for his neighbor was continually revealed in his daily intercourse with men. If you ask me what was the character of his conduct towards his friends, the Apostles,—towards the poor, the needy and suffering, the sick and afflicted,—towards his enemies, and, in short, all mankind,—I say that *his conduct was amiable*, and that he manifested this beautiful amiability towards his Apostles

1. *In their spiritual necessities,*
2. *In their corporal necessities,*
3. *In supporting their faults and shortcomings.*

1. You cannot call that love a true love which is not solicitous for the spiritual welfare of its object. Now, tell me, my brethren, was not Jesus solicitous for the spiritual welfare of his Apostles? *Has he not selected them from amongst many?* He sees one catching fish, another mending nets, a third, receiving taxes in the custom house;—he sees that they are not in the way of salvation, and he gently and amiably invites them to follow him. He would take these fishermen, this publican, under his own care and make them fishers of men, laborers in the vineyard of the Lord, that they might secure their own salvation, and promote that of countless souls: "Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Matt. 4: 19.

*He makes them his disciples, and instructs them in the mysteries of God.* That sublime doctrine which he brought down from heaven, is the subject of his instructions. Very often, after he had spent many long hours in preaching and healing the sick, and when he was fatigued by the exertions and labors of the day, the Apostles would come to him, in the evening, questioning him in regard to the lessons and instructions which he had given to the people; and, far from rebuking their persistence, with the

greatest love and condescension, he gave them the desired information. Nay, sometimes, our Blessed Lord purposely spoke to the multitude in parables, because he foresaw that his plainest lessons would produce no fruit; but to his Apostles, to whom it was "given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God,"—Luke 8: 10—he privately interpreted all parables and similitudes.

*How many miracles did he not work in order to confirm them in faith!* Did he not multiply the loaves and fishes for their sake? Did he not delay his journey to Bethania till Lazarus was dead, in order to give them a palpable and striking proof of his omnipotence and Divinity, that they might more firmly believe his words? Did he not cast out the dumb spirit from the demoniac, when their own best efforts failed, to convince them that some kinds of devil can be expelled only by prayer and fasting? Again, ask our Blessed Lord, why he took Peter, James, and John to the summit of Mount Thabor, and there revealed to them his glory? It was his love for them, his solicitude for their spiritual welfare; they were to gaze upon the vision of his heavenly splendor, that they might not waver in their faith when they beheld him in his humiliation on Mount Olivet, in his ignominy on Golgotha's cross.

*And how often, how fervently, how urgently, did he not pray for them to his Eternal Father!* In the most touching words, he assured them of his solicitude for them, at the last supper, and in order to manifest to them the superabundance of his love, he permitted them to be the first to eat his adorable flesh and drink his precious blood. Yes, my dear brethren, peruse the whole life of our dear Lord, from the hour when he first made choice of his disciples, down to the solemn moment when, even in his dying agonies, he committed St. John to his afflicted Mother's care,—consider his condescension towards them throughout it all, and you will find that he always treated them with the most obliging love and tender consideration. In all their trials and temptations, they came to him for advice, consolation, and relief. Hence, he often encouraged them to believe in him as well as in his Eternal Father, and not to let their hearts be troubled.

**2. NO LESS DID HE MANIFEST HIS LOVE FOR THEM IN THEIR TEMPORAL NECESSITIES.** Here, too, he had frequently to make use of his omnipotence in order to relieve their wants. When St. Peter, for instance, had no money with which to pay the didrachma, or tribute for the service of the temple, Jesus ordered him to go to the bank of the river, and draw out the first fish that came up with his hook, which he foretold to him would carry in its mouth the stater, or amount of money sufficient for the tax both on our Lord and his apostle.—At another time, the disciples labored all night without success. Jesus came to them, walking on the water, and commanded them to cast out their nets: they obeyed his command, and caught so many fish, that the net was almost broken with its weight and their ship in danger

of sinking. Often, when, for many days, they had traversed the land in all directions, seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel, until they were worn and wearied with their exertions, he took them away, like a loving father, from the tumult of the people, that they might enjoy their needed rest in some quiet secluded spot.

*3. And how much patience did he not show towards them in their faults and shortcomings!* Many times he had spoken to them of that kingdom which he had come to establish upon earth,—many times, he had told them that his kingdom was not of this world,—yet, after all his assurances as to the spiritual nature of his dominion,—two of his disciples sent their mother to him with the request, that, when he sat upon (what they expected to be) an earthly throne, he would allow one of her sons to have place at his right hand, and the other, at his left. They had not yet understood why he had come upon earth; but with all meekness he explained to them once more, that a share in his kingdom was not to be hoped for in this life, but in the life to come.

Again, come with me, my brethren, into the palace of Annas, the high priest, on the night of our Lord's Passion. That blind leader of the blind questioned Jesus (as St. John tells us), concerning his doctrine and disciples, but whilst he made some brief reply as to the former,—regarding his disciples, he answered him nothing. With sublime self-forgetfulness, he refused to betray them to their enemies: if he spoke of them at all, he would have had to make known their cowardice and inconstancy in forsaking him in the hour of danger,—therefore, he kept silence. Again, in the garden of Gethsemane, behold, what heavenly patience he had with the weakness of his Apostles. He sees them lie down to sleep at the very time when he is about to suffer a mortal anguish for their sakes. O, my brethren, what finite heart can ever comprehend the infinite depths of that lonely Agony in the Garden! Prostrate on the earth, he writhes in the desolation of that supreme abandonment,—then, bathed in a bloody sweat, he returns to them, waking them with words of reproachful tenderness: “What, could you not watch one hour with me?” He goes again to pray; they heed not his request to pray with and for him; they relapse again into their self-indulgence. Once more, he comes and finds them sleeping; he repeats his entreaty, and goes back with blood-drenched garments to his solitary vigil under the olive-trees,—but they do not comply with his request. And when he returns the third time, he finds them still asleep. Then, the soldiers come to apprehend him, and the faithless disciples awaken only to flee away, leaving the divine Victim, alone, like a defenceless lamb, in the jaws of the ravening wolves. But, meek and forbearing, Jesus supports all their weakness and ingratitude with tender love, and never during his Passion, or after his Resurrection, reproaches them for their infidelity. Thus, everywhere, and on all occasions, Jesus manifested his love for his Apostles.

Neither was it a sentimental love, which made him overlook their faults and imperfections. No; where their salvation or the honor of God required it, he did not fail to call their attention to their shortcomings with all openness and earnestness. The Gospel records his rebuke to James and John, when they besought him to call down fire from heaven upon that Samaritan city which refused to receive him and his disciples. "You know not," said he, "of what spirit you are." When he foretold to them his Passion, the impetuous Peter cried out: "This shall never be done to thee, Lord;" as if he would say: "We will defend thee, that they may not apprehend thee and deliver thee into the hands of the Gentiles,"—although, when the hour of trial actually came, they did not defend him, but all fled, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. But Christ said, nevertheless: "Begone Satan, thou knowst not what is God's, but only what is of the world." And when the same disciple, in his rash zeal, cut off the ear of Malchus (the high-priest's servant), in the garden of Olives, our Lord reproved him for the act and healed the injured man upon the spot. And how often did he not upbraid his followers with their want of faith: "O ye of little faith!" His love was a sincere and holy love, and herein, my brethren, we should imitate him.

II. He who really loves God and his neighbor, must not only confess his love with the mouth and say: "I love thee, O my God, above all things, and my neighbor as myself for the love of thee,"—but he must manifest this two-fold love by his every day deeds. If a man, my dear brethren, declares with his lips: I love this person or that person as my true friend,—tell me, would you believe that he spoke the truth, if, when his so-called friend was blindly approaching a precipice and running the risk of losing his life, you perceived that he did not warn him of his danger or strive to keep him back from certain destruction? Look around you in the world, and you will see that many are walking on the brink of an infernal precipice, are in danger of perishing eternally; now, if one is cold and indifferent under such circumstances, if he is careless of the eternal risks run by so many blinded and perverse Christians,—can you believe, my brethren, of such a one, that he sincerely loves his neighbor, even though he assure you that he does, a thousand times? Hence, if you desire to practise fraternal charity, and thereby imitate your Saviour,

I. *You must be solicitous for the salvation of your neighbor;* you must, as far as lies in your power, keep him back from sin and eternal perdition, and endeavor to induce him to love and serve God. Truly, you cannot do a greater service than this to your neighbor, or promote the glory of God more effectually. St. Augustine teaches the same truth in these words: "If you love God and your neighbor, draw all to the love of God. If you love God, endeavor to effect, not only that you love him yourself, but, also, that your friends, acquaintances, and all that come in contact

with you, be won to his love." The renowned king and conqueror of the world, Alexander the Great, one day came to Diogenes, the philosopher, and said to him: "Ask of me any favor, and I will grant it." And, lo! since the king was standing, at the time, in such a position as to obstruct the rays of the sun from the philosopher, Diogenes asked him for nothing, except that he would cease to stand between him and the sunlight. A mighty monarch, Otto II., Emperor of Germany, once visited the Christian hermit Nilus, who lived in the odor of sanctity, and said to him: "I consider myself as thy son; ask of me any favor whatsoever, and I will grant it with pleasure." St. Nilus laid his hand upon the Emperor's heart, and replied: "The only favor I ask of your majesty is, *that you will think of the salvation of your soul.* Though you are emperor, you must die, and render an account of your stewardship, like other mortals." What a difference, my brethren, between the favor which the proud pagan asked of Alexander the Great, and that which the pious hermit requested of the Emperor Otto! Do you perceive how the latter practised fraternal charity? He was poor, and he could have asked the royal bounty to procure for his subsistence something better than herbs and roots. But no, he considered it as a favor done to himself, if the Emperor would but be intent upon, and solicitous, for the salvation of his immortal soul.

And you, my friends, think you that you have true fraternal charity, when you are so little solicitous for the salvation of your neighbor? O how many opportunities offer themselves to parents, to show their love for their children, by endeavoring to educate them in a good and Christian manner,—by instilling a true horror of sin into their youthful minds, and by defending them from so many dangerous occasions of offending God. I will not say that the very reverse is often the case,—but think of it, Christian parents, I implore you, and be warned before it is too late. Remember, that both the natural and the divine law oblige you to love your children truly, and that your children in eternity will little thank you for having them taught to sing, or to play the piano, or to dance, or to skate, if you have not, at the same time, taught them to pray well and to live as devout Christians.—Let no one tell me that he loves his fellow-men in the true sense of the word, if he does not strive, as far as in him lies, to prevent the sins of others. Hence, I cannot help reminding you again of what I have reminded you before, dear brethren,—that you make it a daily practice to offer to God the precious blood of Jesus Christ and his merits, as well as those of his Blessed Mother and of all the Saints, in order to hinder one sin, or to convert one sinner. But although the body is of far less value than the soul, yet it, too, should not be neglected in its necessities; and, for this reason, like your Blessed Lord, you must manifest the love of your neighbor.

2. *In the corporal necessities of your fellow-men.* Here the words of the Sacred Scripture hold good: "Never do to another what thou wouldst

hate to have done to thee by another." Tob. 4: 16. "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them." Matt. 7: 12. As this is nothing new to you, my dear brethren, I will only remind you of what St. Magdalene of Pazzi used to say on this subject: "I feel a great deal happier and more satisfied when I can do a service to my neighbor, than if I could unite myself with God in meditation. For, when I meditate, it is God that helps me, but when I serve the poor, I am helping God, since our divine Saviour himself has declared that he will look upon what we do to the least of our brethren as done to himself."

3. Finally, we must manifest and prove our fraternal charity *by patiently bearing with the faults, weaknesses, and imperfections of our neighbors, and by not speaking of them uncharitably.* "Your words towards your neighbors should be full of charity," says St. Bernard; "you should, if possible, cover the faults of others, or, at least, excuse the intention, if the action cannot be excused." It would be really worth while to preach a sermon on this point alone, dear Christians, for, if this, also, belongs to fraternal charity,—that we do not speak of the faults of our neighbors,—then fraternal charity is, in truth, a rare virtue in our days. Go where you may among your fellow-men, and tell me, if the faults of others do not constitute the principal subject of their conversation? What good does all this evil-speaking do? Does any benefit accrue to anybody from it? Will the party you talk about, be any the better for your detraction, your censure, your bitter criticism? But you say: "What I have said is true, and, surely, one is allowed to speak the truth." Well, go on, speak the truth if you will; but begin with *yourself*,—say that you are a liar, a slanderer, a calumniator; tell your attentive listeners first of your own conceit and pride, of your imaginary piety; lay bare all those hidden sins which you so sedulously endeavor to veil under a hypocritical condemnation of others,—and after that, you will hardly be willing to speak about the faults of your neighbors. It is true, my dear brethren, that where you have it in your power to prevent sins and scandals, you may be permitted to speak of them with gentleness and discretion, even as Jesus Christ reproved his Apostles for their faults; but, if it be only to nourish an innate self-complacency or bitterness, or to gratify a morbid love of gossip, the sins and shortcomings of others should never be made the topic of our conversation.

Let us, then, in our intercourse with others, imitate our divine Saviour in his beautiful spirit of fraternal charity; for, it is the touchstone of the true love of God, and both together will infallibly conduct us to the celestial Mount Thabor, where, with faces resplendent as the sun and garments whiter than snow, we shall gaze upon the heavenly transfiguration of our Lord, not as the three Apostles did for a few fleeting moments upon the mountain,—but as long as God shall be God, through the everlasting delights of a bright and blissful eternity. Amen.

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

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### THE BEAUTY AND UTILITY OF THE ANGELICAL SALUTATION.

*“Hail full of grace.” Luke 1: 28.*

The festival of this day, my beloved brethren, the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is, of all the festivals of the Catholic Church, one of the most beautiful in its history; and one of the most important in its significance. It is the first ray of the morning star which announces the end of a long and dark night; it is the rosy morn which ushers in a beautiful and glorious day; it is, in short, the beginning of our redemption; for, on this day “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”—our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was conceived in the chaste womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Not only is this holy day, my dear brethren, thus most beautiful in its origin, but, (as I have already said,) it is, also, remarkable in its significance, since it has furnished us with one of the sublimest of prayers—the Angelical Salutation. What a beautiful prayer, indeed, is that of “the Angel of the Lord.” What wealth of thought, what tenderness of words, what power and genuine feeling do we not find contained in it! What is more beautiful, what more lovely, sweet, and affecting to human hearts and ears than the words: “*Ave Maria, gratia plena. Dominus tecum!* Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.” “*Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui*—Jesus. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb—Jesus.” “*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae.* Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death.” You often recite the *Hail Mary*, my dear brethren; I dare say, you repeat it many times in the day,—or, at least, at morning, noon, and night,—but have you, also, considered,—do you consider, in fact, every time you say it,—the beauty of this salutation? Nay, more,—have you ever experienced in yourselves the tenderness and the loveliness, the power and the blessing, which are contained in the devotion of the *Angelus*? There may be some among you, dear Christians, who have never considered, who have never experienced all these pious emotions. Let me, then, speak to you to-day on the beauty of the *Angelus*, and of the Angelical Salutation. I repeat that it is a most beautiful prayer, and I shall endeavor to prove to you that this is evident.

- I. *From the times at which it is recited,*
- II. *From the significance of its words, and*
- III. *From the effects which it is calculated to produce in well-disposed hearts.*

Holy Mary, we salute thee, and we implore thee to obtain for us the grace that we may understand the beauty of the Angelical Salutation, and that by means of this prayer which we so often recite, the blessings of heaven may flow upon us for time and eternity!

I. The beauty of the Angelical Salutation is evident from the time at which it is recited. You well know, my dear brethren, the fixed times for the ringing of the *Angelus*. You well know that the chimes of the blessed bell are heard early in the morning,—again, at noon,—and yet, once more, again in the evening.

1. Behold, the long, dreary night is past, and the golden morning dawns.—What a holy, what an important moment! That you may thoroughly understand its holiness, its importance, *the bell rings out in the early dawn*, and lovingly invites you to prayer. Behold, whilst Mary was praying in her little chamber at Nazareth, she was greeted with the Angel's salutation, and, then and there, received the message of salvation;—in prayer she was replenished with the grace of the Holy Ghost; and during prayer, the miracle was accomplished,—the rising of the Morning-Star of God, the coming of the Sun of Justice, the dawning upon the earth of the great day of Redemption, which was to be accomplished through Jesus Christ incarnate. “The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Ghost!” Your first thought in the morning, my dear brethren, should be directed to God; and should you forget him in that opening hour, the *Angelus*-bell reminds you of your duty, and calls out with its sweet silvery tones, that another morning has dawned for you, another new day of salvation,—a day of labor for heaven, of which it is said: “Work whilst it is day.” And how will you be able to labor and toil for the kingdom of heaven; how can you bear the heat and the burden of the day, if you be not full of the Holy Ghost? O, do not forget, dear Christians, to sanctify the first hours of the day; do not neglect your morning prayer, but prevent the dawning of the light with the sacrifice of your lips, and fervently invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit.

2. *At noon, the Angelus-bell rings out the second time.* In the hour of the Angel Gabriel's annunciation, Mary gave her heart entirely to God, for she said: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” At noon, then, my brethren, you should reflect whether or not your heart is drawn away from God by temporal cares, or by the riches, honors, and pleasures of earth.

The half of the day,—perhaps, the half of your life—is gone! Pause for a moment: look back upon the past, and, then, look forward into the future. What have you done hitherto? Is the morning, is the first half of your life, gained or lost for eternity? Have you labored and toiled only for this miserable earth, and done nothing for heaven? O, if you clearly understood the sound of the noon-day bell, how deeply, how strikingly, how piercingly, it would cry out to you: “Serve God,—serve God,—serve God! Begin now, at least, to serve him; there is but little time left; the half of your life is spent, your years in the future may not be as many as your years in the past have been; you are rapidly approaching your last end; the evening of death, the dark, cold night is coming, “when no man can work.”

3. And when, for the third time, the Angelus bell rings out upon the air, the evening *has* come and the voice of the chimes seems to exclaim to you: “It is consummated,—it is consummated!” Mary, having replied to the Angel Gabriel: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,”—was entirely conformed, that very instant, to the adorable Will of God, and co-operating, thus, by her fidelity, in the great mystery of the Incarnation,—within her spotless womb, (as the Sacred Scripture says): “The word was made flesh.” O, how gloriously was the Immaculate Virgin rewarded for her fidelity, for her humility, for her obedience! And how happy shall *you* be, dear brethren, in the evening of your life, if you have been faithful to God and obedient to his holy will. How you will enjoy that rest from all labors and fatigues which the peaceful evening brings; with what joy and consolation you will cry out in your turn: “It is consummated!”—“Now, O Lord, dost thou dismiss thy servant in peace.” Truly, beauty, and significance attend upon the times appointed by our holy Mother Church for the recitation of the *Angelus*!

II. The beauty of the *Angelus* is also evident from the words which it contains; for, in truth, it is an abridgment of the *Gospel*; it is a little summary of the science of salvation, which Jesus Christ has brought to us from heaven.

The *Angelus* is an epitome of the *Gospel*; for how, I ask, was the Incarnation of our Blessed Lord brought about? Behold, my dear brethren, the Eternal Son of God desired to become incarnate in order to redeem mankind from the guilt and the punishment of sin; he willed to be born of a woman, and that highly favored, blessed woman was Mary, the immaculate Virgin. An arch-angel is chosen to carry to her the message of salvation, and, hence, it is said by the Church: “The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.” It is a declaration of joy and peace, it is the grandest and most important message ever sent from heaven to earth, a message in

whose blessings we participate, and whose purport deserves our most earnest and serious consideration. But in order to ratify this celestial message, the humble Mary must consent to it. Will she freely make this sacrifice which is demanded of her? Will she recognize in this message the will of God, and fulfil it? Will she not, by her refusal, prevent the Incarnation of Christ? Hear what answer she makes to the declaration of the angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." Shout, O ye heavens,—rejoice, O earth, and renew thy face! Mary consents to become the Mother of God, consents to conceive the Eternal Word, the long-desired of nations; for, at the very instant that she gives her consent by abasing herself as the obedient and humble handmaid of the Lord, that very instant the great and ever-memorable mystery of the Incarnation is accomplished in her chaste womb, by the power and operation of the Holy Ghost. "The Word was made flesh—and dwelt among us." Thus, the Incarnation of Christ has been brought about, and the history of the Incarnation of Christ is epitomized in the words of the *Angelus*, making it, as we have said, *an abridgment of the Gospel*.

2. But it is, also, *a summary of the science of salvation*. You and I know, my dear brethren, that the Angel of the Lord brought this message from heaven, not only to the Blessed Virgin, but also to all mankind. And O, what a sublime message is this! The message of Redemption, the message of our adoption as children of God, the message of our vocation as Christians to the joys of eternal salvation. Thus, the message is interpreted: "Hearken, and take heed, O children of men! You have strayed away from the paths of the Lord, you have entered into devious and crooked ways; you have forgotten your glorious destiny, you are on the brink of eternal perdition. But I announce to you your approaching rescue and salvation. You shall be redeemed from sin and hell, and God himself whom you have so long forsaken and offended, will be your Saviour. He has not forgotten you, he has the greatest compassion for your misery, and he is about, at last, to put a period to that misery; he will recall to your minds that you are created for a higher and a better world; he will enlighten, cleanse, and sanctify you; he will take all your sins upon himself; he will assume your nature, dwell among you, even as a beloved Elder Brother in the midst of his hapless brethren. Yes, it is his only desire to be born amongst you, that you may be cleansed from sin, and re-born to a new life of grace: that you may become new men in Christ; and all this shall be done, if you will only consent to co-operate with his grace. Behold the message of the angel to each one of us, my dear brethren; it is the beginning of the order of salvation in this, that in it, God first offers his long-desired assistance to his sinful creatures, first promises them an immediate redemption, and gives to us all a guaranty of

eternal life; that in it, he reveals his adorable will to us, and placing before us the image of an incarnate God, enables us to imitate him in his virtues, and to lay hold of the succoring Hand, which will rescue us from eternal misery and death.

But, if the infinitely merciful purpose of God is to be accomplished in us, my dear brethren, our will must accede and consent to it, we must take hold of his outstretched hand with faith and confidence,—we must say with Mary: “Behold, we are thy servants, be it done unto us according to thy word. Yes, O Lord, be our Redeemer, be our Saviour; take our souls entirely for thy service; we will believe in thee, we will hope in thee, we will love thee; thy ways shall be our ways; we will gladly be reborn in thee, since we sincerely desire to possess eternal life with thee!” Thus, my dear Christians, our will must meet the purpose of God half-way, for, as St. Augustine declares: “God who created us without our assistance, will not save us without our co-operation.” Only when we co-operate with the grace of God, when we open our hearts to the inspirations of our redeeming and atoning Lord Jesus Christ, only then the divine order of salvation will have been accomplished in our souls, only then the words of the Angelical salutation will have any significance for our hearts. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Truly beautiful is the devotion of the *Angelus* in its origin and meaning, and you should consider all this, my brethren, as often as you recite it. You need not doubt but that it will prove a great blessing to you in your spiritual life, and you may rest assured that you should love it and prize it because of its beneficial effects.

III. Why should not the devotion of the *Angelus* be beneficial, my dear Christians, to your hearts, minds, and wills, nay, to your whole lives, provided you recite it with attention, with humble recollection of spirit, and according to the intention of our holy Mother, the Church?

I. You cannot fail to profit by this beautiful devotion, if, when you hear the *Angelus*-bell in the morning, when you awake to serve the Lord, or at noon when you take your meals, or in the evening when you prepare for your needed rest,—if, I say, you give ear to those blessed chimes, and acceding to their invitation, look up and beyond into the better world, and contemplate in spirit the prize which awaits the valiant warrior of Christ. If you, thus, begin, prosecute, and finish your day’s work with the Lord, it cannot be but that you must more and more understand the vanity and frailty of all earthly things, more and more become acquainted and enamored with the things above. It must needs be that you seek the one thing necessary, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and daily approach nearer to the will of God, which is your sanctification; and,

2. You cannot fail to profit signally by this beautiful devotion, my dear brethren, *if you consider carefully the sublime mysteries of this prayer*, viz: the Incarnation of God, the faithful devotedness of Mary, and your own eternal destiny.—Such reflections must certainly awaken, enliven, nourish, and preserve your faith in higher goods, in the kingdom of God; they must tend to make you humble and grateful; from the dawn of the early morning even unto the shadows of the late evening, they will keep you in that disposition which deprives temptation of its allurement and power, and which produces with a steadfast perseverance, all the affections and works of a child of God.

3. And this devotion cannot fail of its essential benefit to your souls, if, as often as you hear the *Angelus*-bell, you vividly represent to yourselves the beauty of the Angelical salutation; if, *at the sound of the first bell*, you call to mind the Incarnation of Christ, and reflecting that it had been eternally decreed from the beginning, consider, at the same time, that your redemption and sanctification were, also, the will of God from all eternity; if, *at the second bell*, meditating on the readiness of Mary to conceive the Son of God in her chaste womb, and contribute her share towards the Incarnation of the Messiah, you, at the same time, consider how you, too, should with equal readiness receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your hearts, and accept the blessings of your redemption; and finally, if *at the third bell*, reminding yourselves of the infinite love and mercy of God, who in time assumed our nature, was made flesh and dwelt among us:—you contemplate with thanksgiving the accomplishment of your salvation which you may piously hope to attain, if, in love and life, you have become one with Jesus, and can present to him your hearts as the clean and holy temples of the Holy Ghost. For, if you attentively consider these points, all this must be accomplished in you, my dear brethren. Your hearts must be filled more and more with love and gratitude towards God, must increase in readiness to serve him all the days of your life, and in fervor to promote his glory and your own salvation; nay, as often as you recite the *Angelus* attentively and in the right spirit, you will reach a higher degree of perfection and acquire a new merit for heaven.

O, my beloved Christians, may this, in truth, be the fruit of this gracious day! May you, after having learned the beauty of this prayer, love to recite it with the greatest devotion,—at morning, noon, and night, in all places, wherever the sound of the blessed bell may rehearse to you the sublime history of the Incarnation. And finally, may Mary, the Virgin Mother of our Blessed Lord, obtain for us by her powerful intercession, the grace that we may continue in heaven for all eternity to salute her with the words with which we have so often saluted her on earth: “Hail Mary, full of grace.” Amen.

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

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WE MUST RESEMBLE THE ANGELS WHEN WE SALUTE MARY IN PRAYER.

*“Hail, full of grace.”—Luke 1: 28.*

Our holy mother, the Church, has prescribed for us a multitude of salutations, with which we can and should honor, venerate, invoke, and praise the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God; such as: “*Hail, holy Queen,*” “*Hail, star of heaven,*” “*Rejoice, Queen of heaven,*” “*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary;*” but among all these salutations and prayers, there is none that can be compared to the Angelical salutation. This, my dear brethren, is the “*Hail Mary,*” with which the Archangel Gabriel addressed the Blessed Virgin, when he announced to her the Incarnation of the Son of God, the sublime mystery which we commemorate in the festival of to-day. The Church is accustomed to unite this salutation of the Angel with the Lord’s prayer, the “*Our Father;*” it is most frequently repeated in the holy Rosary; and three times a day, viz: at morning, noon, and evening, the Church calls upon us by the ringing of the *Angelus*-bell to recite this beautiful invocation.

It is well for you often to imitate the example of Gabriel, and greet the immaculate Mother of the Lord with “*Hail, full of grace;*” for, since this salutation was first addressed to her by the Angel of the Most High, its repetition must naturally be very welcome to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us, then, with heartfelt love and in the grace of the Holy Spirit, offer this salutation to our heavenly Mother, day and night: “*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*”

But, remember, dear brethren, that this salutation is the *Angel’s salutation*,—it was addressed to Mary by an Angel. This is very instructive and suggestive. It suggests that we must strive to salute Mary *as angels and not as malicious sinners.* Hence, Cardinal Hugo says: “If you wish to enter the presence of the Virgin and salute her,—you ought to be an angel.” And for this reason the Lord sent an angel to salute our immaculate Mother,—to teach us that we must endeavor to lead an angelic life in the flesh, if we expect our salutation to be acceptable to the Virgin. And by what virtues was this angel-messenger specially distinguished? By three virtues in particular:

- I. By purity;*
- II. By charity;*
- III. By humility.*

If we wish our salutation to please *the purest, most charitable, and most humble of Virgins*, we must salute her in true dispositions of purity, charity, and humility; and this, dear Christians, is the subject of my discourse to-day.

I. The angel who bore the heavenly message to Mary, was distinguished *by purity*,—for an angel is sullied by no sin, defiled by no earthly passion, and contaminated by no carnal or impure act; and thus, he who desires acceptably to salute Mary must be

1. *Free from every sin, at least from every mortal sin.* For, behold, when our Lord and Saviour instructed his Apostles in prayer, and exhorted them to pray, he commanded them that before they engaged in that holy practice, they should put off pride, ambition, hypocrisy, and every sin, and bring to prayer a pure soul, a pure heart, and a pure conscience (Matt. 6.) Could Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, take pleasure in a prayer or salutation offered by a great sinner, who continues obstinate in his sin? In his Epistle to the Hebrews, (6: 6,) St. Paul writes, that Christians who live in mortal sin, crucify again to themselves the Son of God, and make a mockery of him; how abominable, then, to the Mother of Christ must be the salutation of an unclean person, who even though he repeat to her the words of the Angel's greeting, continues to sin grievously, and daily renews the crucifixion of her divine Son? If you be a sinner, and desire to greet the Virgin Mother, first put in practice her sweet commands; for her counsel to you, dear brethren, is identical with that which she addressed of old to the waiters at the wedding-feast of Cana: "Whatever he shall say to you, do ye." And what does he, her divine Son, say to you? He says: "Go, show yourselves to the priests, make your peace with God, and sin no more." In the imperial courts of ancient Rome, it was customary for a courtier to search the persons of all who wished to enter the presence of the emperor, in order to discover whether they carried concealed weapons with which to assassinate the sovereign. In like manner, dear Christians, you who wish to enter the presence of the Queen of heaven, and offer her your homage, must first examine your conscience to see whether you have not concealed within its folds some mortal sin, which could inflict a deadly wound upon her divine Son.

2. *He who, like the angel, desires to greet Mary acceptably, must, like him, be defiled by no earthly passions.* When Moses, (as is related in the Old Testament,) saw the bush on fire, and went forward to view it more closely, God called to him out of the midst of the bush and said: "Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Ex. 3: 4, 5.) By this *bush* the holy Fathers understand *the Blessed Virgin*, and by the *shoes*, which are made of the

hides of animals, the temporal and perishable things of this earth. Moses was commanded to put off the shoes from his feet, to indicate that he should not have too great a love for temporal and perishable things; and the injunction given to him should also be remembered by us, when we wish to speak to Mary. That holy Mother's judgment of earthly things is the same as that of her divine Son who said: "My kingdom is not of this world;" and, with St. Paul, she ever instructs her devout clients to: "Seek the things that are above and not the things that are on the earth."

3. But, especially, must he who wishes acceptably to salute the Immaculate Virgin be free from every stain of impurity. His mouth must be free from dissolute words; his heart must be free from shameful thoughts and desires; his body and soul free from all pollution of sensual sin. Before you go to visit any person of respectability, you wash your face, hands, and mouth; how much more, then, should you, before addressing the holiest and purest of Virgins, cleanse your hearts and tongues from all defilement. What kind of an Angelical salutation is that which an unchaste tongue and an impure heart offer to the Queen of Angels? What pleasure could the Virgin of virgins find in such a mockery of prayer? A certain young man who was addicted to habits of impurity, nevertheless practiced certain devotions to the Virgin Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin is said to have appeared to him at a time when he was suffering from extreme thirst and exhaustion, and offered him a most delicious beverage in a very unclean vessel. When he turned with repugnance from the draught, Mary looked upon him with sad, reproachful eyes, saying to him at the same time: "In this manner, you offer to me your devotions; in this manner, you honor me with the Rosary. Prayer is acceptable to me,—but by your impure life you render it an abomination to me." Of the great penitent, Mary of Egypt, we also read that, in the days of her sin, she once visited the Holy Land, not, however, to satisfy a pious devotion, but seeking upon the journey a better opportunity for continuing her abandoned life. When she had reached Jerusalem, she wished to enter the church with the throng of devout pilgrims, but she was held back as if by some invisible hand. She was greatly terrified, and trembled in her whole body. Her eyes happening to fall upon a picture of Mary, tears of compunction bathed her face; she solemnly promised to consecrate herself to the Lord by a life of penance, calling the Blessed Virgin to bear witness to her sincerity; and at that moment, the supernatural power which prevented her entrance into the church was withdrawn, and she was able to join the other pilgrims before the altar of God. Dare not, therefore, my brethren, salute Mary, the purest of Virgins with impurity upon your souls; you can not please her when you thrust yourselves defiled into her stainless presence and salute her presumptuously with the angel's holy words.

II. The heavenly messenger who announced the Incarnation to the Virgin Mary, was distinguished *by charity*; for, with the Angels there is no envy, no enmity, no injustice, no hatred, no anger, no dissension, no strife. The most perfect peace, the most beautiful union exist among them; the stronger do not oppress the weaker, the greater do not look down upon the lesser, nor do the lesser envy the greater. Thus, with those who wish acceptably to salute Mary, *justice, mercy, peace* and *concord* must dwell. What pleasure could even the Angelical salutation afford Mary, the Mother of God, if the heart of the person who recites it, is full of injustice,—if his hands are stained with the guilt of injuries done his neighbor? Does Mary, perhaps, regard these evils more leniently than the God of heaven and earth, who says by his prophet: “When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my face from you; and when you multiply your prayer, I will not hear, for your hands are full of blood”—? Is. 7: 15. Could she attend lovingly to the salutation of one who is full of enmity, uncharitableness, and desires of revenge? Is Mary not like her divine Son, who has said to the envious and the revengeful: “If thou offerest thy gift at the altar, and there shalt remember that thy brother hath anything against thee: leave there thy gift before the altar, and first go to be reconciled to thy brother: and then come and offer thy gift”—? (Matt. 5: 23.) Will Mary’s feelings towards the unmerciful be different from those of her Son who says by the mouth of his apostle: “Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy”—? James 2: 13. Therefore, imitate the angels in love, peace, and concord, and shun injustice, enmity, strife and discord, that you may acceptably honor the “Mother of fair love” with the Angelical salutation.

III. Finally the angel who brought the message to the Virgin Mary, was pre-eminently distinguished by humility; for it was especially through humility that the good Angels remained in possession of eternal happiness and were confirmed in glory, whilst the bad angels, on account of pride, were forever cast into hell. And every one who wishes worthily to salute Mary must strive to do so out of the lowliness of an humble heart. The distinguishing characteristic of the Blessed Virgin was humility; she herself was the most humble hand-maid of the Lord; what pleasure, then, can she find in a salutation offered to her by proud, vain, self-conceited, and haughty men? Will she not agree with her divine Son who has said: “Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”—? (Luke 14: 11.) Or, will not the Blessed Virgin, with St. James, declare to her guilty and presumptuous clients, that: “God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble”—? (James 4: 6.)

Moved thus, my dear brethren, by the example of the angel, let us endeavor to salute Mary with an angelic heart, with an innocent life, and with stainless lips. Let us offer that heavenly salutation to her with purity of heart, with charity, and humility, that our greeting may be, indeed, an

Angelical salutation which the Blessed Virgin can accept with pleasure; otherwise, she will be forced to apply to us those terrible words of Holy Writ: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." (Matt. 15: 8.) Those who pay to her only an exterior homage, resemble those women who endeavor to hide their homeliness and ugliness with paint and cosmetics. Under those false adornments, they exhibit themselves as beautiful, but they are not so in reality. Thus, those also who honor Mary only with their lips, falsely proclaim themselves as friends and clients of that Blessed Mother; but, on account of the corruption of their hearts and the wickedness of their lives, they are truly and really her enemies. Hence, I advise, nay, I command you, my dear brethren, that without hypocrisy, with your whole soul, with all love and with all devotion and truth, you cry out to the Virgin Mother of God: "Hail Mary, full of grace!" Amen.

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## SERMON FOR THE THIRD FRIDAY IN LENT.

## IS THERE NO RELIEF?

*“The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because his commiserations have not failed.” Lament. 3: 22.*

How dreadful it is, my dear Christians, to be confined for years to a sick-bed of pain, to languish and to suffer, yet, not be able to die! How dreadful it is to be condemned to prison for life, and to remain day and night, in dismal solitude, between damp walls! . . . How dreadful to awake from a trance in one's coffin, and to cry out for help in vain! . . . But infinitely more dreadful is it, to be stricken by the avenging justice of God, and to weep, despairing, in everlasting misery. This lot befalls the unhappy sinner who departs this life in final impenitence. “Hell devours him who dies in his sins.” (St. Greg.) But, is there no relief,—no escape? No, there is no resource for him who once has fallen a victim to hell,—there is no relief, nor hope of relief for such a one for all eternity. But for you, sinner, who are still living, there *is* relief. A solemn voice of olden times says: “The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because his commiserations have not failed.” Yes, his commiserations have not failed, there is hope, there is relief, yet

- I. *In the heart of God, and*
- II. *In the bosom of our holy Mother, the Church.*

I. There is relief for the sinner in the *heart of God*. Is it really so, you ask? Do not doubt it for a moment, for

1. God wills not the perdition of the sinner.

a) His own word is our guarantee for this fact: “Thou hast mercy upon all, because thou canst do all things, and overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance.” Wisd. 11: 24. “The Lord waiteth that he may have mercy on you.” Is. 30: 18. “As I live,” saith the Lord, “I desire not the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his evil way, and live.” Ezech. 33: 11. “The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save.” Luke 9: 56. “The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but beareth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance.” 2. Pet. 3: 9. All these

passages contain the words of God, the promises of God, so true and infallible, that the mere doubt of them would be sin. God wills not the perdition of the sinner.

b) *You have an example of it in your own person.*

We have heard that every mortal sin is an infinite crime, and deserves hell. Hence, God would act consistently with his justice if, after the commission of his first sin, he would fling man into the everlasting pool of fire. But, because he does not desire the death of the sinner, he withholds his avenging arm,—he waits and endures. . . . Have you not experienced this yourself, my brother? How old are you? Forty, fifty years, or, perhaps, older. How long is it since you fell into your first grievous sin? Was it not in your youth? And, yet, you are not in hell? To the first sin you added the second, the third, the fourth. And, still, you are not in hell? Your grievous sins have increased, doubtless, with years in number and weight. And, yet, O sinner! yet, you are not now in hell? Perhaps, a few days ago, perhaps yesterday, perhaps to-day, you have sinned wilfully and mortally. And yet, (I repeat it,) you are not now in hell? What does this prove? That God wills not your perdition; for, if he willed it, he could long ago have delivered you to eternal damnation. . . .

2. *God wills the sinner's rescue; he wills his salvation.*

a) *He reaches forth his hand to him.* All those passages of the Sacred Scripture, my brethren, which speak of the mercy of God, assert this consoling truth. They are countless; but I shall adduce only a few. “The Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickedness.” Numbers 14: 18. “Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” Ps. 22: 6. “The earth is full of the mercy of God.” Ps. 32: 5. “Praise the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.” Ps. 135: 1. Nay, more, my dear Christians, even to the sinner that is sunk in the lowest abyss of corruption and degradation, our merciful Father offers his helping hand. “If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow, and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool.” Is. 1: 18. And not only does he offer to the sinner his saving hand, but, O merciful condescension!

b) *He draws him, also, to his heart.* In the Sacred Scriptures we find the most touching examples of this divine tenderness and clemency in the conversions of Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, the penitent thief on the cross; and more especially in the parable of the prodigal son. The latter, having grieved his father very much, and wasted his entire substance by living riotously in a strange land, returns, at last, to his father's house in abject poverty and with a lacerated heart. And how does that good father receive

him? "When he was, yet, a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and, running to him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him." Luke 15: 20. Was not this touching example sufficient in itself to convince the most incredulous of the tender patience of the Most High with his erring creatures? And yet, as if this parable of his marvelous clemency needed yet stronger confirmation, our blessed Lord saw fit to preface it with another consoling similitude: "What man among you, that hath a hundred sheep; and if he lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, doth he not lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing; and coming home, call together his friends, saying to them: Rejoice with me because I have found my sheep that was lost! I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance." Luke 15: 3-8.

O, my dear brethren, so great is the mercy of God which reaches forth a helping hand to the sinner and draws him to his sacred, burning heart, that it cannot be explained in the words nor conceived by the thought of man. (St. Chrys. hom. 2 in ps. 20.) This tender mercy of God is the only hope of the sinner, and if he has recourse to it in time, he will meet with a loving reception, and obtain entire forgiveness of his crimes.

II. There is help and relief for the sinner in the *bosom of the Church*; for, God has appointed her

i. *To receive sinners*

a) *With all love.* Our good God, my brethren, has established in his Church an unfailing fountain of relief and salvation for fallen man. He has given her, with the tender office of a mother, the commission to stretch forth her arms to sinners and draw them to the embrace of her maternal bosom; wherefore, she never ceases to call to those afflicted ones: "Come to me, all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." (Matt. 11: 28.) And if they will but listen to her pleading accents, if they will but "run after the odor of her ointments," she will receive them with extended arms, and clasps them to her breast. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, to give them a crown for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and a garment of praise for the spirit of grief." (Is. 61: 1-3.) God has appointed his Church to receive all sinners,

b) *Without any exception.* She does not say: "Come to me, you that labor and are heavy laden," but "Come to me, *all* you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." Matt. 11: 28. Though the sinner

be ever so miserable and loathsome,—he is lovingly received. Though he may have run for years in all the crooked ways of vice, though he may have lived in habits of the grossest sin all the days of his life,—he is lovingly received. Though he may have committed adultery like David, murder and rapine like the thief on the cross, yea, even treason and apostacy, like Judas; though, in fact, he may have trampled under foot all human and divine laws,—once truly repentant, my dear brethren, he is lovingly received. “Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet, I will not forget thee.” Is. 49: 15. . . .

More than that. God has appointed his Church:

2. *To confer grace on sinners.* For that purpose he has given her

a) *The treasure of all salvation*,—to wit: the blood which our adorable Redeemer shed upon the cross. With this treasure all debts are paid. “Christ died for us; much more, therefore, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him.” Rom. 5: 9. “If the blood of goats and of oxen, and the ashes of a heifer being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled, to the cleansing of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Holy Ghost, offered himself without spot to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?” Hebr. 9: 13, 14. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” 1. John 1: 7. This priceless treasure of salvation is deposited in the Church, she has the key to it in her hands, and can take from its unfailing coffers, the wherewith to pay all our debts. A single drop of the adorable blood of Jesus is sufficient to outweigh the sins of thousands of worlds. Besides this, God has given her

b) *The power to loose from sin.* “And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. . . . And whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth, it shall be loosed, also, in heaven.” Matt. 16: 19. “Amen, I say to you, . . . whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed, also, in heaven.” Matt. 18: 18. “Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” John 20: 22, 23. From these passages it is evident that the Church in her priesthood possesses the power of forgiving sins, and of reconciling the sinner with God. To those who walk upon earth is committed the administration of that which is in heaven; and the priests have received a power which God gave neither to the Angels nor Archangels. To these it was not said: “Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.” The kings of this earth, it is true, have, also, the power to bind, but only the body. But the binding of the priests regards the soul and reaches into heaven. Whatever

the priests do here below, is ratified by God above, the Lord confirming the sentence of his servants. (Chrys. *de Sacerd.* lib. 3, cap. 5.)

In conclusion, my dear Christians, let us seriously consider how infinite is the misery of the sinner, since the judgment of an angry God, and the hell of an avenging God await him. . . . But there is relief in the heart of Jesus, and in the arms and bosom of his holy Church. . . . Therefore, sinner, despair not. If all the demons of hell should cry out to you: "You are lost!" reply to them with humble faith and confidence: "I can yet be saved. The heart of God, my Father, and the arms of our holy Mother, the Church, are still open to receive me. Into that heart, the asylum of sinners,—into those arms, the refuge of the miserable and afflicted, lo! I flee with courage and contrite hope, and *there*, with the help of my merciful Redeemer, I shall find grace and everlasting salvation!" Amen.

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**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.**

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ON THE MISERABLE STATE OF THE RELAPSING SINNER.

*“At that time Jesus was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb. And when he had cast out the devil, the dumb spoke.” Luke 11: 14.*

It appears from this day's Gospel, my dear brethren, that our blessed Saviour had, by his divine power, restored to a poor dumb man the faculty of speech, of which the Evangelist declares him to have been deprived by the operation of the devil. This miracle, (as well it might,) excited in the minds of all who beheld it, the greatest astonishment. “And the multitude were in admiration at it.” The Pharisees, however, who were secretly jealous of the growing reputation of Jesus among the people,—perceiving the impression which so wonderful a prodigy had made upon their minds, and unable, at the same time, to deny its reality, had recourse to the expedient of impiously ascribing it to the preternatural agency of the prince of darkness.—“But some of them said, this man casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils.” While others, with a design equally malicious, demanded of him that extraordinary sign from heaven, which from a passage in the prophet Daniel, they conceived to be peculiarly characteristic of the Messiah.—“And others,” continues the text, “tempting, asked of him a sign from heaven.” To this request, Jesus did not think proper to pay any attention. But with respect to the wicked and blasphemous assertion which attributed the cure he had miraculously performed, to the power of the devil,—as such a false judgment might tend to counteract the success of his divine mission by the unfavorable impression it was capable of producing on the minds of the multitude,—so that he deemed it advisable to make a clear and decisive reply: “Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and house upon house shall fall; and if Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?” The spirit and import of this sententious argument, my dear brethren, may be thus elucidated: It cannot, surely, be supposed that the devil would take an active part in the subversion of his own empire. This, however, he would unquestionably do, if he enabled Christ to expel his agents from the posts of which they had taken possession.—He would become a confederate with his own most decided and irreconcilable enemy, in promoting the interests of truth and virtue which Jesus labored indefatigably to advance, and which are diametrically opposed to the interests of Satan; and, thus, like a kingdom divided against itself, or a house which is a prey to internal discord, his dominion would unavoidably experience

its downfall.—Our blessed Saviour then proceeded with consummate wisdom and address, to turn against the Pharisees the very arms which they had employed for his defeat,—for he intimated that the pretext which they urged against himself, as a worker of miracles, would also, if admitted, militate against those among them, who exercised the power of casting out devils, and whom they were accustomed to hold in the highest veneration. He, therefore, confidently appealed to them to decide by what influence the latter succeeded in that extraordinary operation, claiming in his own regard, (as in justice he well might,) the advantage of the decision which they should give to his appeal.

“Now, if I cast out devils by Beelzebub, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I, by the finger of God, cast out devils, doubtless the kingdom of God is come upon you.” Far from acting either in concert with, or in subordination to the prince of darkness, he asserted at once his opposition and superiority to him. In proof of which, he represented to them the devil under the simile of an armed warrior, guarding the fortress in which all his treasures were deposited, with vigilance and strength, and retaining undisturbed possession thereof till attacked and defeated by our Saviour’s superior force. In such cases, as in the instance of his expulsion from the dumb man of to-day’s Gospel, he was constrained to abandon his stronghold, and be despoiled of all the effects which it contained: “When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things which he posseseth are in peace; but, if a stronger than he come upon him and overcome him, he will take away all his armor wherein he trusted, and will distribute his spoils.” Finally, reminding them, my dear brethren, of the proverb which appears to have been current among them in those days: “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth;”—(which implied that not to defend was to oppose, that neutrality was to be regarded as virtual or constructive hostility,)—our divine Lord left them to consider if the decided opposition which he, by his conduct, had uniformly manifested to error and vice, could possibly be regarded in any other light than that of the most unequivocal and avowed enmity to *him* who was the chief promoter of both, and by whose influence they pretended that he had acted.

Having thus repelled in the most victorious manner, the blasphemous imputations of the envious Pharisees, our Lord proceeded to deliver the parable of the unclean spirit who, having abandoned for a time his human habitation, finding it afterwards swept and garnished, (as described in the sacred text,) returns with a reinforcement of other demons more wicked than himself, who establish in it their permanent abode, and thus render the condition of that unhappy soul more wretched than it was at first.

The abandonment of his habitation by the unclean spirit, and his return to it when swept and garnished, are lively images, my dear brethren, of what takes place in the soul of a sinner, on the occasion of his brief con-

version to God, and of his subsequent relapse into sin. That miserable man is living in the most abject slavery to the demon who possesses him, he is rushing on to his destruction, in the very height, it may be, of his vicious career, when the light of heaven, like that which flashed upon the eyes of St. Paul on his road to Damascus, breaks in upon his mind, and a voice, too, not unlike the one which was heard by the Apostle on the same occasion, saying to him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"—speaks inwardly to the sinner by those feelings of remorse which bitterly reproach him with the turpitude of his criminal disorders. Awakened thus, by the influence of divine grace to a sense of his condition, he attentively regards his interior through the medium of faith; and O, what a ghastly and disgusting spectacle presents itself to his view! He beholds with horror the noblest faculties of his spirit degraded to the most ignoble purposes, his affections prostituted to unworthy objects, and his whole soul covered throughout, as it were, with a loathsome leprosy. He reflects on the transient and unsatisfactory character of those sinful pleasures for the enjoyment of which he has reduced himself to such a melancholy and deplorable state. He contemplates with dread that dismal dungeon of everlasting woe, prepared for the future torment of all the workers of iniquity. And, finally, my dear Christians, the consideration of the anger of the omnipotent God whom he has offended by his transgressions, fills him with terror and dismay. In this agitated state of mind, like the Apostle of the Gentiles who, as is related in the Acts of the Apostles, trembling and astonished, said: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—he raises his heart to heaven, and begs to be directed as to the course to be pursued in order to be freed from his lamentable condition. And as Paul, of old, was admonished to go into the city of Damascus where he was assured he should receive, (as he did from Ananias,) every necessary instruction for the future regulation of his conduct,—so, the sinner is likewise instigated by the inward suggestions of divine grace, to repair for the same purpose, without delay, to the city or temple of God where another Ananias awaits him in the person of the anointed priest and confessor. Mindful of the example of his divine Master, that compassionate friend of sinners, the minister of Christ, listens with attention to the poor sinner's tale of woe, sympathizes with him in the anguish of his troubled mind, and without affecting to palliate or disguise the real character and danger of his situation, points out to him a source of relief which, if duly resorted to, will enable him effectually to extricate himself from his miseries. That blessed resource is the boundless mercy of the very Being whom he has offended, and which, if (penetrated with sentiments of penitential sorrow,) he earnestly solicit, he is assured will be graciously conceded to him through the merits of Jesus Christ who died for his offences.

Encouraged by this sweet and consoling assurance, the poor penitent avails himself of the sacred privilege without delay; he prostrates himself

with humility before the throne of mercy; bewails with compunction his past disloyalties to his eternal Sovereign, renews to him with sincerity, his solemn professions of future allegiance, and, in compliance with his injunction, lays open his conscience to the minister of reconciliation, who, in the capacity of ambassador of the great Peace-maker between God and man, pronounces the sentence of absolution in his behalf, and restores him once more to the divine favor. O! what an admirable, what a heavenly revolution has now taken place in the soul of the repenting sinner! No longer does he feel within him those bitter pangs of remorse, which before destroyed his inward quiet. No longer does he start back with disgust and horror from the contemplation of his disordered conscience. No longer is he appalled by the terrific prospect of God's avenging justice, and of the punishments prepared for the reprobate in the infernal abyss of hell. Oh no, nothing of all this now remains to wound his feelings, or disturb his interior repose. His mind is once more the seat of tranquillity and order. Reason, enlightened by divine faith, has resumed within him its legitimate sway. It sits enthroned in the centre of his heart, and exercises by its authority a just control over its subject passions. On whatever side he casts his eyes, he is gratified with scenes of exquisite delight. The ravages which had been committed by his rebellious appetites have all been repaired, and he has the satisfaction of beholding his renovated soul, calm, placid, and serene, exhibiting throughout her pure domain the choicest ornaments of celestial virtue.

To the pleasure, my dear brethren, which he derives from this satisfactory state of mind, is added that which arises from the relation in which he now stands to the Supreme Being, and of the destiny which awaits him beyond the grave. Having been happily reconciled to his heavenly Father and restored to the privileges of his adopted children, he lives with security under the divine protection; nay, more, he looks forward with exultation to the period of his dissolution when his fidelity will be rewarded with a profusion of blessings "such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it not entered into the heart of man to conceive."

Such, my beloved brethren, is the happy change which fails not to take place in the soul of a sinner, when he abandons the way of iniquity and returns, once more, with sincerity to the path of righteousness.

No wonder that the devil, like the unclean spirit in the parable, should quickly relinquish a dwelling which must now, necessarily, have become so offensive to him! No wonder that he beats a precipitate retreat from that habitation embellished with celestial graces, and which must consequently be most displeasing to the eye of one who delights in naught save moral deformity! Accordingly, like the unclean spirit of the Gospel, who quitted his primitive abode for dry places without water through which he wandered, seeking rest, the familiar demon of the repentant sinner immediately deserts a residence which has now become hateful to

him, because of the blessed change it has undergone,—and seeks repose in places more congenial to his malicious disposer. Yes, my dearly beloved, he seeks it in the souls of hardened and abandoned sinners where, roaming, as it were, in splenetic mood over those dry and barren deserts, and looking around with savage joy on the dreary waste which presents itself to his view, where not a single virtue is seen to bloom, not a solitary spring of divine grace is anywhere discovered to refresh the weary traveller on his journey, he endeavors to indemnify himself for his temporary banishment from his olden abode, to which, however, he flatters himself he will shortly be permitted to return.

Unfortunately, my dear Christians, his expectations are but too frequently realized. For, in quitting a habitation which has become insupportable to the malignity of his nature, he directs his agents to employ their craftiest artifices to subvert, if possible, that new order of things, and to plunge that well-regulated soul, once more, into its former anarchy. Those agents, alas! are the allurements of the world, and the corrupt propensities of the human heart. And when, by the success of their combined machinations, the cunning demon finds, at length, his object attained; when making his rounds, (as the apostle says,) “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,”—he sees the house that was “swept and garnished” thrown into disorder; when he beholds the fair and lovely forms of the numerous virtues which adorn the soul of the repentant sinner, dashed, as it were, from their pedestals, like so many beautiful statues, (broken in pieces and swept contemptuously, as so much rubbish, from their sacred repository), and the hideous images of the opposite vices occupying their places; when he perceives humility succeeded by pride, continency by lust, meekness by anger, and charity by hatred,—then, accompanied by his associates in wickedness, then, alas! my brethren, does he rush with precipitation into the desecrated mansion, and render its condition more miserable than it was at first. “Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”

This, my beloved brethren, is a true description of the stratagems employed by the Arch-enemy of mankind (and unhappily he is but too often successful!) to cause the poor unfortunate sinner to relapse insensibly into his former transgressions. Not being able to maintain his stronghold in a soul which is become the temple of the Holy Ghost, he endeavors by the agency of corrupt nature, and by the temptations of worldly honors, riches, and pleasures, to seduce it by degrees into a course of action which may induce the Holy Spirit to abandon it, and thus enable him to recover his abandoned citadel. By the insidious artifices of these infernal emissaries, the converted sinner is first of all imperceptibly led to relax his customary vigilance; and the passions, in consequence, begin to renew their oper-

ations. These operations, however, are conducted with such secrecy and silence, as not to excite the smallest alarm. They produce their effect, nevertheless, upon the unsuspecting soul. They gradually diminish its relish for heavenly contemplations. They render it less susceptible of spiritual impressions, and, hence, occasion it to be less fervent and assiduous in the practice of its religious duties. In the same proportion as prayer is neglected, the supply of supernatural succor, (which is imparted only to those who earnestly beg it of God,) is withheld from that careless soul. And, thus being insensibly debilitated by the passions which, like a hidden and deadly disease, work in secret, and acquire additional strength from the progressive diminution of resistance which is opposed to them; and being destitute, at the same time, (through his own neglect) of adequate assistance from heaven,—the converted sinner is assailed from without by the corrupted practices and maxims of the world. These, my brethren, acting in concert with the treacherous enemies who betray it from within, succeed at length in producing in that miserable soul a pervading spirit of disorder which is inconsistent with the sanctity, with the august presence of the spirit of God. He abandons it, therefore, to Satan and his infernal crew, who immediately take possession of it, and reduce it to a state of the most degrading servitude. O, what a melancholy alteration in its condition, is the soul of that poor unfortunate sinner thus doomed to experience! The temple of the Living God converted into a den of wicked spirits! The fair daughter of Sion, the chaste spouse of Jesus Christ, reduced to the condition of a common harlot! Such are the images which but too faithfully delineate the dreadful revolution produced in the soul of the relapsing sinner. He had destroyed in his soul the works of the devil and banished him out of his heart; he had restored that interior domain to God, who had again taken possession of it, re-established in it the kingdom of his grace, sanctified and honored it, once more, with his gifts, and with his most holy presence, and made it, in short, his glorious throne upon earth. The relapsing sinner overturns all this great work, and makes use of so extraordinary a mercy of God, only to insult him the more outrageously.

If a king had not only pardoned a base traitor, but restored him to all his forfeited privileges and honors, and to the highest posts and dignities of his kingdom, would he not deem his bounty most grievously insulted, and his majesty most insolently outraged, if that wretch should return again to his villainous practices against his royal person and crown? Would not this be a treason so base and wicked, that no man could be found so profligate and abandoned, so lost to all sentiments of honor, as to be capable of committing it? This, however, is the treatment which the King of kings, the Lord God of heaven and earth, receives from the relapsing sinner, who with the most contemptuous hardihood, insults his divine bounty, and tramples upon and destroys in himself, the most precious gifts of heaven.

The sinner when he repents, promises to God in the most solemn manner to renounce sin for ever, and pledges his word to this effect in the most sacred contract of the Sacraments. Men are jealous of their word when given to a fellow-creature; there is nothing they abhor more than the character of a perfidious wretch; and certainly, nothing should be more inviolable than a fidelity to engagements, since it is the bond, nay the soul and essence, of all public faith; and without it no contracts, commerce, or society amongst men could exist. But the relapsing sinner is guilty of the greatest violation of fidelity that can be possible. He breaks his word which he has repeatedly given to God, first in his solemn baptismal vows, and again, as often as he renews his pledge of loyalty in the holy Sacraments. Frequently, then, my brethren, was this sacred compact entered into between him and his God, the condition of which was a fidelity to duty on his part, without which Almighty God would never have admitted him to pardon and to the participation in his grandest graces, for it was on condition that he reciprocally bound himself to the service of his heavenly Father, that the latter enriched and honored him, and engaged himself to always treat him as his son. This infidelity is, then, the basest breach of faith,—of faith given to God, and this in the most solemn manner, in the holy temple of the Lord, at the foot of his blessed altar, all the glorious choirs of heaven being witnesses and depositaries thereof. It is the violation of a contract and alliance sealed by all that is most holy and terrible; confirmed by the blood of the Lamb, (the immaculate Lamb of God,) and by the most sacred ceremonies of the Church; and vowed in the hands of God's minister who received them in his name. By an unparalleled treachery, this contract is broken; these holy engagements are trampled upon by a base creature, while God remains most faithful on his side, and the eternal allegiance and fidelity sworn to him in the face of heaven and earth are openly violated, even whilst he is still showering down his favors on the miserable transgressor. The altars, the church-walls, the confessionals, the ministers who there received these engagements in the person of Christ himself, all the heavenly spirits, in fine, who were witnesses of the penitent's tears and protestations, will rise up in judgment against him, and condemn him from the words of his own mouth: “The stone from the wall will cry out.” (Hab. 11: 4.)

Well then may the last state of that man, my beloved brethren, be said in the parable to be worse than the first; since the appalling circumstances which in the first instance made so powerful an impression upon his mind, are not calculated in the second to produce the same effect. He becomes familiarized by habit with the brilliant light which first awakened him, as it were, from his lethargy, and aroused him to a sense of the wretchedness of his condition. He no longer conceives the same lively notions of the deformity of sin and the shamefulfulness of his past excesses. The terrors of the divine judgments cease to inspire him with the same overwhelming

dread. The rewards promised to God's faithful servants in a future state, present no longer the same attractions to his vacillating mind; and the more frequent his relapses, the more feeble are the impressions produced by the inspirations of divine grace.

Such, then, my beloved, being the dreadful consequences of relapses into sin, let me caution you against it with the utmost earnestness. Should you have, at present, the happiness to stand in God's grace, be humble and diffident, and beware lest you fall. But should it be your misfortune to have fallen, apply at once for succor to the throne of grace, and aided by that supernatural assistance, (which is never denied to the humble and contrite heart,) make a strenuous effort to rise again from your miseries, and recover your erect attitude before God and his holy angels. Yet, remember at the same time, that the recovery of that noble attitude is rendered more difficult by each succeeding relapse; and tremble, O sinner! lest, provoked by your reiterated infidelities, the Almighty in his anger should abandon you to your weakness; and that, thus, you should fall, at length, to rise no more. Be watchful, therefore, my beloved brethren,—be vigorous, be constant. Guard with circumspection the avenues of your souls against the enticing seductions of worldly vanities. Keep your attention fixed on the motions of those enemies within the walls, those traitors that lurk within your own bosoms, particularly the arch-traitor of your predominant passion; and let the strong arm of a firm and energetic government awe them into subjection and submission. You are ready to brand with dishonor the violator of his engagements with a fellow-creature, and what more sacred and solemn engagement can there be than that which you have contracted with your omnipotent Creator? You reflect with horror on the baseness of the man who, to gratify a craving appetite, or to serve some selfish purpose, takes part with the enemies of his best friend and benefactor in their opposition to his interests; and where is the friend, where is the benefactor to be compared with him, whose love surpasseth all understanding, and whose boundless beneficence is equal to his love?

To what severe restraints, moreover, are you not prepared to submit, my brethren, what painful sacrifices are you not willing to make, when such are pronounced necessary for the preservation of your corporal life? And what comparison is there between the few fleeting years of your earthly existence and the endless duration of eternity, throughout which your destination will be ultimately determined by the indulgence or mortification of your disorderly appetites? To the felicity of that future state did our Blessed Saviour allude at the conclusion of the parable of the unclean spirit,—when, to the woman who exclaimed from the crowd, “Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that gave thee suck,” he emphatically replied: “Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Rev. P. F. GIBNEY, Oregon.

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

## ON INVALID CONFESSION.

*“The last state of that man becometh worse than the first.” Luke 11: 26.*

In ancient days, my dear brethren, there was a miraculous pool near the city of Jerusalem, called Probatica or Bethsaida. An angel from heaven came down at certain times or seasons, to trouble the waters thereof, and whosoever first stepped into the pond after the motion of the water, was cured of whatever disease or infirmity afflicted him. This pool is not unlike the Sacrament of Penance, because, as the waters of Probatica (which, by the way, signifies “the sheep-pond,” a name in itself of special application to our subject,) as the waters of Probatica had no virtue unless an angel came to trouble them, so, in like manner, confession produces no effect unless an angel of God, that is, *divine grace*, disturbs the conscience of the sinner. And as the waters of the miraculous pool were able to cure all the ailments of the body, the miraculous fountain of confession heals the soul of whatever malady it is subject to. Among the great multitude present at the pond of Bethsaida, (lying helplessly within the shadow of its five porches,) we find that Jesus healed only one, and that one, a man who had been afflicted with sickness for thirty-eight years. It was not that our divine Lord was either unable or unwilling to heal all the other sufferers, my dear brethren, but it was because they did not come to the healing pool determined to confess and forsake their sins. Do we not frequently meet with similar cases at the fountain of confession? Thousands upon thousands are weekly approaching the tribunal of Penance, expecting to be healed of the disorders of their souls; but, alas! they return to their homes in a much more dangerous condition than when they quitted them,—and, therefore, our blessed Lord says that “the last state” of such men “becometh worse than the first.” What is the reason of this? Can it be said that confession has not the same healing effect *now* as in the primitive times of the Church, that it has lost its power in an age when it is most necessary? Tell me, my brethren, were confession and penance ever more needed in the world than at present? Was there ever an unhappy epoch when sin was more prevalent? ever a time when lies were more general, swearing more frequent, lust and debauchery more abominable, drunkenness and gluttony more in fashion,—theft, fraud, and every kind of injustice more common amongst all classes of people, than at present? Ah, no. But it is further to be remarked, that among the aged and infirm who were at the pool of Bethsaida some were lame, some blind, and some, as it were, dried

up in their limbs, and withered with disease. Art not these miserable ones fitting representatives of many who go frequently to confession? Like the *blind*, they do not behold their sins, because they do not examine their consciences; like the *lame*, they stop short and are unable to walk in the ways of God, because they make a bad confession by concealing or palliating their sins in confession; and, like the dry and withered members of the paralytics, the soul of many derive no profit from confession, because they are utterly devoid of true sorrow and contrition of heart. This is why so few, my brethren, make valid and fruitful confessions, or, in other words:

- I. Confession is invalid when made without due examination of conscience;*
- II. Confession is invalid when all mortal sins are not confessed; and*
- III. Confession is invalid when made without sorrow and contrition of heart.*

I. As the body is subject to a thousand diseases which, sooner or later, draw it to the grave, so the soul is subject to a thousand spiritual dis tempers which, sooner or later, draw it to hell. There is this difference, however, between the diseases of the body and those of the soul,—each particular disease of the body has its particular cure; but, for all the united ailments of the soul, the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed a single panacea, and that is—Confession. Confession is the cure, the remedy for the deadliest crimes a Christian can commit; an unfailing preservative against the most dangerous infection of sin.—If you but go to confession with a hearty sorrow for having offended your God, and with a firm purpose of amendment, your sins shall certainly be forgiven; for, Christ has said to his Apostles and to their lawful successors: “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” Mark, then, my brethren, that, since confession is so effectual a remedy against the poison of sin, it is a remedy absolutely necessary to the souls of all who have mortally offended God after baptism, provided it be in their power to have recourse to it. Nay, more, if the sinner should distribute all his goods to feed the poor, if he even shed penitential tears of blood, fasted rigorously during his whole life, and prayed so constantly and fervently as to wear out, if possible, his very tongue,—this, and a thousand times as much, he might do, and yet, if he were in mortal sin and refused to avail himself of opportunities of confession, all his works of piety and penance would profit him nothing. If he were so happy as to be free from sin, of course this cleansing Sacrament, (which is called “the second plank after shipwreck,”) would not be necessary, but so long as the soul is stained with grievous sin, no man can say that he is free from the obligation and duty of confession. It is true, my dear friends, that many Christians approach the

sacred Tribunal of penance, but few there are who profit by it. The great mass of penitents are like the blind, tarrying at the brink of the pond in expectation of being healed, but who *cannot behold the waters*; they go to the sacrament with the pretence of telling their sins, but they do so only after a partial and barren manner; they have but the shadow and the appearance of confession. O, be not deceived, my dear brethren,—such a mockery of confession will not abolish sin, but only serves to increase it, it draws down upon us not the love of God but his hatred; far from making our peace with him, it kindles afresh the fires of his wrath; for, as your creditors will not consent to accept counterfeit money from you in payment for your debts, so God indignantly refuses from you the counterfeit confession you offer him in atonement for your sins.

Is it any other than a lying confession which *he* makes who, being addicted to drunkenness, to lying, swearing, cursing, and blaspheming,—who has given way to a thousand libidinous obscene thoughts, which he did not hesitate to perpetrate in action,—who is passionate, vindictive, and deeply-rooted in bad habits,—and who, after a dissolute life of this kind for twelve months or more, runs to confession with a preparation of ten or fifteen minutes? Is it possible for this man in a momentary examination of conscience to recall those enormous sins to his mind, or to set them in order as he should before his confessor? Ah, no, my dear brethren, if he takes no more time than this to examine his conscience, he makes no other than a lying, a guilty, a profitless confession.

He who frequently goes to confession, who sets a guard upon all his members, who strictly examines his conscience every night in order that he may repent of the sins he has committed during the day, even *he*, dear friends, after all this remote preparation, sets about the work of his conscience with fear and caution, lest he should not cleanse it in a proper manner. What, then, shall we say of those who give free rein to their passions, who stop at no iniquity, (no matter how enormous,) and who never think of their sins till a moment or so before they approach the confessional? Why, they often accuse themselves of trifling imperfections and frailties, and do not recollect the half of the mortal sins they have actually committed. They do not behold the great mountains of iniquity that lie upon their consciences; they are like the blind mentioned in the Gospel who sought relief from the troubling of the water, but instead of salvation they often draw from the fountain of grace naught save eternal damnation. Do not, I implore of you, my brethren, leave a recess or corner of your conscience without careful examination; discharge the important duty without indolence or reluctance; look to every thought that has entered your hearts, to every evil word your tongues have spoken, to every evil action you have committed against God and your neighbor. After discussing and setting them down in order, pour them forth at the tribunal of confession; do not conceal or hide any one sin through fear, shame, or

confusion, for, if you do, your confession will be profitless, useless, sacrilegious,—it will not lessen your sins but increase them, and it would be a thousand times better for you not to go to confession at all, than, going, to profane or abuse the healing means of salvation.

II. Confession is a sorrowful declaration or avowal of our sins to a priest, in order to obtain absolution from him. It is a self-accusation which the sinner makes to God in the person of his minister, to the end that in the name of God and by his authority that anointed minister may grant him absolution or pardon for his guilt. Now, if confession is intended to be a voluntary accusation of one's self in the holy tribunal, why do you, my brethren, instead of accusing yourselves, try there, instead, to excuse yourselves? Why do you throw a veil over your sins, or present them in a different color from their native deformity? Why do you not expose the wounds of your hearts to the physician of your souls, if you ever expect to be healed of them? There are many who habitually lead dissolute and wicked lives, and who commit every day, nay, every hour, the most abominable crimes, yet, when they approach confession, they have nothing to tell but petty venial sins, light and frivolous matters; and should they even accuse themselves of a few of their mortal sins, if you take their own word for it, it is not they, themselves, who are to be blamed for the evil done, but some others on whom they commonly lay the burden. If they happen to swear, it was the result of some just provocation and anger,—their children, or their neighbors provoked them to it; if they happened to stop too long in the drinking-saloon, it was not for the sake of the liquor, but for the sake of the company who enticed them to remain; if they injured their neighbors in their reputation or property, it was but a slight affair, a mere nothing, scarcely worth confessing. The same fate that happened the lame, who sat near the pool of Bethsaida in expectation of their cure and obtained it not, will happen to those people who come, thus, with a lame confession to the sacred tribunal of Penance. If, with these apologies, they succeed at times in blindfolding the priest, my dear brethren, they cannot blindfold the Sovereign Judge who sees not only the bad deed, but even the inmost guilty thoughts of the heart that prompted it. “I am the Judge and the *Witness*,” saith the Lord.

The wolf, when he rushes upon the flock, commonly seizes a sheep by the throat and immediately tears out her tongue, lest she should make any noise that might alarm the shepherd and bring him to her relief. In like manner, acts with many penitents that merciless wolf, the devil; and especially, with young people going to confession. Lest they should alarm Jesus Christ, the shepherd of their souls, with their tears and sighs, he, the infernal wolf, seizes them by the throat,—he deprives them, in a manner, of their tongues that they may not expose their hearts to the shepherd of the confessional. They conceal the faults of their souls, they lie to God, and not

to man, and if God does not make a terrible example of them on the spot by a sudden death, as he did with Ananias and Sapphira for attempting to deceive St. Peter as to the price of the property they had agreed to devote to the common fund,—they shall incur a death ten thousand times worse,—the awful and agonizing death of eternal damnation. Nor is this the only advantage, my brethren, which this accursed wolf takes of mankind. The shame which ought to attend the sinner at the commission of sin, he steals from him at that sad moment, but as soon as the evil is accomplished, and the poor penitent is disposed to confess his crime,—the devil returns to him a double-fold, overwhelming shame, so that he who sinned, perhaps, boldly and openly, without a blush, is ashamed in the confessional to lay bare his miseries to his physician, although he is assured that unless he confesses his sin, there is no possibility of being healed. Open, then, your eyes, my dear brethren, and behold the perfidious snares of the devil; expel the secret poison of sin out of your hearts, or it will be the ruin of your souls. Lay open to your kind physician the manifold wounds which the infernal wolf and your own base passions have inflicted on you, lay them open without excuse, and with sentiments of profound and real contrition, otherwise, they will rankle and fester in your interior until they become a deadly gangrene, aggravated beyond all alleviation or cure.

III. Those who offered sacrifice to the Lord in the Old Law were accustomed to slay a cow or an ox, and cleanse the flesh in water; then, after cutting it into small pieces, they placed it upon the altar, where the priest extended his hands over it, and kindled a fire beneath it to consume it. A sacrifice of this kind was calculated to make peace between the Jewish people and their God; it assuaged his wrath and withdrew his scourges from his guilty children. In like manner, let each sinner who is resolved to make his peace with God, offer the sacrifice of his soul upon the altar of confession. Let him first remove from it the filthy scum of sin and the old withered skin of indifference,—let him wash and cleanse it with abundant, briny tears of penance; let him cut it, as it were, into fragments with the sharp knife of contrition, a heart-rending sorrow for having offended God, and as the priest extends his hand over him, saying those blessed words: "I absolve thee from thy sins,"—the flames of divine love will be enkindled in his soul, consuming everything that is evil therein, and the eternal Father will vouchsafe, once more, to be reconciled to his penitent child. Thus, confession will free him from the heavy vengeance that hung, like a fatal sword, over his guilty head; it will quench the burning flames of hell that were prepared for him; it will kindle the fire of grace in his cold heart; it will cleanse his soul that was so black and hideous with its sins, and make it, we trust, dear friends, as pure and bright as it was after holy Baptism. This hearty sorrow, (which is so necessary for a true

repentance,) a person may possess in two ways: the first, when he shows his remorse and sorrow in his exterior by his tears and sighs; the second, when it grieves him to the heart to have committed sin, although he does not manifest it externally. The first sort of sorrow is to be highly commended and is most meritorious, but it is not necessary for forgiveness, since it is not every one who can shed tears when he would; but the second sorrow which is a contrition, by God's grace, within the reach of all—is absolutely necessary in the Sacrament of Penance or confession, for unless the latter be accompanied by a hearty sorrow or remorse for sin, it would be no other than a profitless, a sacrilegious abuse of a divinely—instigated Sacrament.

Ah! how few, my brethren, come to confession with a sincere sorrow! How many imitate the infirm at the pool of Bethsaida, and come to render an account of their conscience with a dry and withered heart! How many approach the sacred tribunal with far less solicitude and anxiety than they bring to their temporal business, as if, in fact, they were going to a place of amusement! They imagine that if they tell all their sins, all is well, and nothing more is required of them; as to contrition or a hearty sorrow for their offences, alas! they are utter strangers to it,—a fact which is easily known by the non-amendment of their lives after confession, by their sudden relapses into the very sins of which they have just so carelessly accused themselves. “To-day thou confessest thy sin,” says *À Kempis*, “and to-morrow thou again committest what thou hast confessed.” Do you not see the blasphemer as much addicted to his sin after confession as before? Do you not behold the lascivious returning to their foul vices after confession, as the dog returns to his vomit? Do you not see defrauders and thieves as bent upon depriving their neighbors of their property after confession as before? What, you ask, can be the reason of this? O, my dear Christians, it is the want of a real, heartfelt sorrow. If those unhappy penitents possessed a sincere and genuine abhorrence of sin, there would be no fear of their immediate relapse into it.

But what will become of those who thus dishonor confession, who go under the pretence of performing it rightly, but approach it, instead, without the proper dispositions, without due examination, without candor, without true contrition? Or, what will become of those who often promise God in their confessions to abandon their sins and amend their lives, but who never keep those solemn promises? Oh, how this Sacrament which Jesus Christ instituted to be the life of their souls, is changed by their abuse into a deadly poison; how this Sacrament which, when rightly received, bears with it a blessed sentence of absolution, is changed in their regard into an abominable sacrilege conveying to their wretched souls a sentence of eternal condemnation! “God maintains his patience with them for a while,” says the royal Prophet, “but he will bring them to an account at last.” As if he would say: Those who lie to me now, who promise to amend their

lives, and do it not, I shall bear with them for awhile, I will let them proceed with their wickedness, but the time will come when I shall cast them into a dark, dismal prison where they will have no other company than the devils; where their ears will hear nothing but curses and blasphemies; where their food will be no other than sulphur and brimstone; where their drink shall be no other than gall, wormwood, and everything most bitter; where infernal fires shall consume them, infernal racks tear them asunder; devils torment them in every power of their souls, in every faculty of their bodies, in every affection of their hearts; and all that without intermission or relief, as long as God shall be God, for ever and for ever! “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.”

Dear Christians, you who have had the misfortune to fall into sin, sleep no longer on the brink of perdition, delay no longer to lay bare your spiritual wounds to your powerful Physician; repair speedily to the fountain of grace, confession, where you shall find health and strength for your afflicted souls. Do not say, like the poor invalids mentioned in the Gospel, that you have no one to help you reach the healing waters. Here is Jesus Christ on the cross with his arms extended to receive you, his head is bowed down to give you the kiss of peace, his feet are nailed to the cross to await your coming. Here is the angel of God, the anointed priest of God and of his holy Church, ready to move the waters for your relief. Come, then, with hope and confidence, come with a hearty sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment; confess your sins candidly and sincerely, without excuse or omission, without extenuation or palliation, as you know yourself guilty before God, and I assure you in his name that he will most lovingly forgive you, that his minister will gladly pronounce over you the sentence of absolution, and that when he has said to you, as Christ said to the paralytic of the Gospel: “Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee,—” you shall find sweet rest for your souls in this life, my beloved brethren, and eternal glory in the world to come, a blessing which I wish you all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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## FOURTH FRIDAY IN LENT.

## HOW TO BEGIN.

*“He that will love life, and see good days, . . . . let him decline from evil, and do good.” 1. Pet. 3: 10, 11.*

How glad, my dear brethren, is the shipwrecked mariner, who battles with the waves and is every moment in danger of perishing, if a rope is thrown out to him, to which he can cling! . . . How glad must not the sinner be, who is wrecked on this stormy ocean of life with the abyss of hell threatening at every moment to swallow him up,—if a strong hand is held out to him to rescue him from eternal perdition. Yes, there is safety, yet, for the repentant sinner in the heart of God and in the arms of the Church. But, how is he to begin the work of his salvation? St. Peter gives the right answer to this question in the following words: “He that will love life, and see good days, let him decline from evil, and do good.” Alas! poor sinner, you have been aroused out of the sleep of sin by the depth of the abyss into which you have fallen, especially by the terrors which await you in eternity. Sighing you have called upon the good God to have mercy on you; you have implored him in the words of the royal Psalmist: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity.” Ps. 50: 1, 2. God *will* have mercy on you, poor afflicted soul, if you will but do what he demands of you; and that is

- I. To abandon the way of injustice, and*
- II. To enter upon the way of justice.*

I. What does it mean to abandon the *way of injustice*? Three things are required for it.

I. *To repent of sin.* So long as a man does not detest evil, he walks in the way of injustice; for his heart is attached to sin. Hence, the first condition of true repentance is sorrow, or contrition for sin. And this contrition must be

a) *Sincere.* It must have its root in the heart,—since, as the heart was formerly the seat of sin, it must now be the seat of contrition. “Rend your hearts,” says the prophet Joel, “and not your garments.” (3: 13.) “An afflicted spirit, a contrite heart the Lord will not despise.” Ps. 50: 9.

The contrition of the mouth and of the lips is not sufficient. The heart must be crushed, must be *bruised*, (as is the literal meaning of the word,) by sorrow, and this sorrow must extend not only to one or two or three sins, but to all sins, at least, to all mortal sins committed. He who truly repents of his sinful life, makes no exception, he detests all grievous sins by which he has basely offended his God. The false contrition which includes only a few sins, and reserves to the penitent even *one* favorite mortal sin or evil habit, has no value whatever in the sight of the Most High.

b) True contrition must be *supernatural*. It must proceed from God, and have God, alone, for its object. Now, my brethren, your contrition proceeds from God if it is caused by his interior impulse, that is, by his divine grace; . . . it has God for its object, if you are sorry for your sins because thereby you have offended God, or, at least, because thereby you have lost heaven and deserved hell. This is the first and most necessary thing: *Be sorry for your sins!* “I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee.” Ps. 50: 5, 6. “I am not worthy to be called thy son.” Luke 15: 21.

2. *You must confess your sins.* “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.” 1. John 1: 9. “No man can be justified from sins, unless he confess his sins.” Concil. Trid. sess. 14, can. 6. 7. We must, therefore, my dear Christians, confess

a) *With confidence in the mercy of God.* If the sinner should believe that God either will not or cannot forgive him his offences, confession would be fruitless. Hence, the necessity for confidence in God “who overlooks (or forgives) the sins of men for the sake of repentance.” Wisd. 11: 24. This confidence, then, my brethren, is necessary, and most especially necessary when the sins of the penitent surpass all measure and number. You must confess

b) *With a sincere self-accusation.* “You must confess, at least, all grievous sins, according to number, species, and necessary circumstances.” Concil. Trid. sess. 17, can. 7. Confess, dear Christians, by laying bare the true state of your soul, without excuses, without palliation; confess as your conscience accuses you, and as you believe yourself guilty before God. This is the second thing. *Confess your sins!* “Be not ashamed to confess thy sins.” Eccles. 4: 31. . . . Though it be ever so hard and painful to flesh and blood, overcome yourself for the love of God, and he, by his grace, will render the confession easy. . . .

3. *You must amend your life.* There would be no sincere contrition,

no firm purpose of amendment, in fact, it would be only a sham repentance, if, shortly after confession you commit the same sins you have so recently confessed. The devil leads some souls into hell by open, unrepented sin,—others by the snare of a false repentance. By returning to their former sins immediately after quitting the sacred Tribunal, they show that they, (as it were,) repent of their seeming repentance. Christ once risen from the dead died no more, so you, also, my brethren, having risen from sin, must sin no more, like Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, St. Paul, and a host of other sincere and holy penitents. You must amend your life, and for that purpose,

a) *Resist the temptation to sin.* After confession, the same temptations will assail you, sometimes more violently than before. You must make war against them, you must struggle against anger, pride, drunkenness, lust, the love of earthly things; you must fight with all vigor, and earnestness, and constancy, as if a kingdom were to be taken; as, indeed, it is,—for the kingdom of heaven is the prize. But in order the easier to stand in battle, you must relinquish the proximate occasion of sin, for as long as you remain in *that*, in spite of the holiest resolutions, you will most certainly relapse, since you undertake an impossibility, *viz*: to avoid sin without avoiding the occasions of sin. “Can a man hide fire in his bosom, and his garments not burn? Or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?” Proverbs 6: 27, 28. Moreover, my dear brethren, you must

b) *Repair the damage caused by your sin.* The neighbor is often injured by sin. Justice requires that reparation should be made. You have stolen something, perhaps, from another;—know, then, that you cannot, and must not, keep it; you must make restitution. You have injured, perchance, the honor or good name of your neighbor, you must restore it. You have scandalized your fellow-men by word and example. You are bound to repair the injury which you have inflicted upon these immortal souls.

This is the third thing. *Amend your life, make satisfaction.* “Put away the strange gods from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only.” 1. Kings 7: 3. “Be converted, and turn from your idols,” (your darling sins and passions,) “and turn away your faces from all your abominations.” Ezech. 14: 6. “Turn from thy sins. Turn away from thy injustice, and greatly hate abomination.” Eccles. 17: 21–23. The illustrious St. Gregory explains that “to do penance means to bewail the perpetrated evil, and to perpetrate the bewailed evil no more.” (*Hom.* 34, in *Evang.*)

II. It does not suffice, my dear Christians, to forsake the way of injustice, but you must, also, enter upon the way of justice. *Decline from*

*evil*,—this is very good; but it is not enough; it is only the beginning of repentance. Another condition is equally necessary for a sincere conversion: *Do good*. This is done

1. *If you do what God commands.*

a) You will do what he commands, my brethren, if you obey his expressed will, such as the Ten Commandments. “The Lord spoke all these words.” (Exod. 20: 1-18.) And this law which was given by the Lord to Moses on Mount Sinai, was confirmed and explained by his Eternal Son who said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” Matt. 5: 17. His Church, too, tells you what he commands, through his representatives: “He that heareth you, heareth me.” Luke 10: 16. The laws of the Church contain the will of God. God speaks through the mouth of his beloved Spouse. Obey, then, dear Christians, the precepts of the Church.

b) *Your own heart tells you what God commands, or what he forbids.* God has written his will upon every human soul, that she may know what is right and wrong. This is the precious gift of Conscience which he has given to every one of his creatures. “In every work of thine regard thy soul in faith; for this is the keeping of the commandments.” Eccles. 32: 27. Walk the way of justice, my brethren. Observe carefully and perseveringly what God and your conscience tell you. . . . True, it is a great thing, and worthy of immortal reward, to thus do the expressed will of your Creator, but a greater thing it is, and belonging to eternal justice that

2. *You endure patiently the trials which he sends you.* All spiritual writers assert that the bearing of the cross is absolutely necessary for every one who desires to walk this world as a Christian and to perform the justice of Christ; for our Lord himself says: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Matt. 16: 24. And again: “He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me.” Matt. 10: 38. Therefore, my brethren, strive to carry your crosses with cheerfulness and patience.

a) *The general cross.* The whole world sighs under misery. “Thorns and thistles,” says the wisdom of Genesis (3: 18). “Sweat of the brow,” says the same book of Moses (3: 19). Since every individual man is a descendant of sinful Adam who was forced in punishment for his disobedience to journey through thistles and thorns in this vale of tears, and to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, every creature of God is subject to labor and sufferings. “Great labor is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming out of their

mother's womb, until the day of their burial into the mother of all.”<sup>10</sup>  
Eccles. 40: 1.

b) *Particular crosses.* Every state of life has its difficulties and obstacles. The mother is tried, more or less, with her children; the wife, with her husband; the farmer, with his laborers; the poor man, with the necessities of his condition.—Bear, then, your cross, each one of you, my dear brethren, with patience and resignation to the will of God. “Join thyself to God, and endure,” says the Wise Man, “that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation, keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.” (Eccles. 2: 3-5.) “Prepare thyself to suffer many adversities, and divers evils, in this miserable life,” says, also, the pious À Kempis, “for so it will be with thee, wherever thou art, and so, indeed, wilt thou find it wheresoever thou mayst hide thyself.” (Imitat. of Christ, libr. 2, c. 12, v. 10.)

From this brief discourse, my dear brethren, you now know what to do, and how to begin the work of your repentance, that you may obtain mercy and save your soul. Do not say it is too difficult. A thousand years employed in the most austere penance are incomparably easier to endure, than a quarter of an hour spent in hell. Begin, then, at once, and, (the grace of God assisting you to a happy termination of your labors and penances,) may it be given you all to realize in your own souls the truth of the passage which forms a consoling supplement to my text of to-day, that “the eyes of the Lord are (ever) upon the just, and his ears open unto their prayers.” Amen.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

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ON THE REAL PRESENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

*“Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to them.” John 6: 11.*

All the Sacraments of the Church, my beloved brethren, deserve our deep veneration, because they are memorials of the merciful love of our Redeemer, and the inexhaustible fountains of his grace. But the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist calls for our very deepest reverence and adoration because it is the greatest of all the Sacraments, and because we receive therein not only grace, but the Author of all grace and the Principle of all sanctity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made Man. No other Sacrament can be compared to this divine treasure of the altar; for, as the sun is the most brilliant of all planets, and gold the most precious of all metals, so the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist is the holiest and most sublime of the seven Sacraments.

The Blessed Eucharist is both, a Sacrament and Sacrifice. It is the Sacrament and Sacrifice of the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which is offered and distributed under the appearances of bread and wine. There is a very great and twofold difference, my brethren, between the Blessed Eucharist as a Sacrament and the Blessed Eucharist as a Sacrifice; as a Sacrament, it is perfected by consecration; as a Sacrifice, its efficacy consists in its oblation. As a Sacrament, it contains really and substantially the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. These words furnish the correct definition of the Blessed Eucharist. When the priest, after the consecration at the Mass, elevates first the host and then the contents of the chalice for adoration,—the Sacrament which is there present is the real Body and the real Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. Although we see nothing but the appearances of bread and wine, we are taught by faith, that this divine Sacrament is not bread and wine, but the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In order to avoid all misconception, we say the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ. My beloved brethren, I beg of you, for a moment to look at the Crucifix yonder. There you see a sacred, wounded body with the blood streaming from its every pore. Is it the real, true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ? No, on the Crucifix there is only a representation of the body and blood of Christ. In the Eucharist, on the contrary, there is the same identical body in which Jesus lived upon earth, and which he still possesses in heaven; the very same blood which circled in his veins

from the time of his conception in his blessed Mother's womb; the very same blood which he shed for our salvation upon the cross of Calvary. But this adorable body and blood in the holy Eucharist are not visible to our corporal eyes; we do not behold the real body,—we do not see the real blood; we see only the appearances of bread and wine; yet, under these appearances, faith teaches us and the unfailing word of Eternal Truth assures us that Jesus Christ is really and truly present. Hence, we say, “under the appearances of bread and wine,” for in this Sacrament bread and wine are no longer present; what was bread before, has been changed into the body of Christ, and what was wine before, has been changed into the blood of Christ. *By the appearances of bread and wine* we do not understand bread and wine, but only what is perceptible to our senses,—as form, taste, and color. In the Blessed Eucharist, my dear brethren, there is nothing left of bread and wine, but the appearances. It appears to our senses to be bread and wine, it looks, tastes, and smells like bread and wine, but it is no longer bread and wine; for, (to repeat once more a sublime and soul-inspiring truth,) under the appearances of bread and wine are really and substantially present, the adorable body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To redeem mankind from the slavery of sin and hell, Jesus humbled himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross. To a finite mind, this infinite excess of bounty, this endurance of indescribable tortures and humiliations for our sakes, would seem to reach the supreme climax of all that could be done for miserable humanity; but our divine Lord went farther, and astonished the world by the institution of this wonderful mystery. Herein his mercy and love seem to have surpassed themselves, and have, as it were, exhausted the riches of his wisdom, power, and goodness; for every thing that is good, great, and precious, is contained and concentrated in this Sacrament. Herein, he has given us the most valuable treasure that heaven was able to bestow, or that the world was able to receive, since, as St. Augustine remarks, God's wisdom could not contrive, neither could his power produce, nor his liberality bestow on us, anything greater or more precious than his own divine self. We sometimes envy, my dear brethren, the happiness of those people of olden days who heard the words of wisdom, grace, and salvation directly from the lips of our Blessed Lord; we envy the happiness of the sick woman (mentioned in the Gospel), who touched the hem of his garment and was healed; but in the adorable Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist you, also, are permitted to see Jesus, you can touch him in your turn,—nay, more, you can even carry him about within you, as Mary once bore him in her chaste womb. Without ceasing to be God, Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist ceases to appear as God. He is truly a hidden God, my beloved Christians; he is, as it were, annihilated under the semblance of our most common-place food; and all

this, to accommodate himself to our weakness, and inspire us with confidence to come to him for help and relief.

During the three years that he remained personally with them on earth, Jesus had given his Apostles numberless proofs of his love. The hour of his departure drew nigh. It was a solemn hour when he, the night before he suffered, sat with his disciples at table to eat the paschal lamb. His words to them on that momentous occasion, were words of tender love. Like an affectionate father, he sat among his beloved children. He bade them farewell, gave them the necessary instructions for their future conduct, consoled them in their grief at his departure, telling them that he must go forth to die for mankind; that it was expedient for them that he should go, and that, after his departure, he would prepare a place for them in the house of his Father. Then, that his dear children might never forget him but keep him in perpetual remembrance, what did he do, my brethren? After having washed the feet of his disciples with his own hands, (in token of the purity necessary for the reception of that Sacrament which he was about to institute for all time, as the greatest monument of his love,) he took bread, raised his eyes to heaven, and giving thanks, he blessed it, and in the simple language of Omnipotence he said: "*This is my body,*" which shall be delivered for you. In like manner, he took the chalice and having given thanks, he blessed it and gave it to them saying: "*This is my blood* of the new Testament which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sin." Thus it was, my dear brethren, that the august Sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ was perfected for the first time, and by our divine Lord and Saviour himself; and Jesus adding: "*Do this in commemoration of me,*" gave to his Apostles, and, through them, to their lawful successors in the ministry, power and authority to do what he had done, namely, to consecrate bread and wine and change them into his sacred body and blood. Lo! in the beginning of the world, when darkness brooded over the face of the universe, the supreme Lord and almighty Creator said "*Fiat lux!*—Let there be light,"—and there *was* light; in like manner, my beloved Christians, at the omnipotent word of the Redeemer at the Last Supper: "*This is my body, . . . . this is my blood,*" the mysterious and miraculous change of bread and wine into his body and blood was instantaneously accomplished.

Since Christ thus solemnly declares that his body is here really present, —who will dare henceforth to doubt it? And since he says, "*This is my blood,*" who will have the hardihood to say that it is *not* his blood? God cannot deceive, my dear brethren,—he is the God of truth. Let us not murmur with the carnal Jews: "*This is a hard saying,—how can this man give us his flesh to eat?*" but let us rather exclaim with St. Peter: "*Lord, thou hast the words of eternal life!*" By him, by his word only, behold! the heavens and the earth were made out of nothing; surely, then, by the same almighty power, one substance can be converted into another. The

words of Christ are plain and explicit; but if they were less plain, less explicit, if there could exist a shadow of doubt as to the meaning of these words, to whom should we apply, dear Christians, in order to obtain a satisfactory solution of our doubt? Most assuredly to the Apostles. How did *they* understand the words of Christ: "This is my body, . . . this is my blood?" St. Paul, to whom, (as he, himself, assures us,) this mystery was communicated by Christ himself, understood these words in their literal sense, and hence, he says: "He that eateth this bread unworthily, or drinketh this chalice unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." Now, if that which we worship in the sacred Species were simply, (as heretics blasphemously assert,) *a figure or type* of our Blessed Lord's body and blood, how would it be possible for the unworthy communicant to eat and drink judgment to himself? How would it be possible for him to incur eternal damnation for not discerning the body of the Lord, if, (according to the showing of such unbelievers,) that sacred Body was not really present in the Sacrament?

It is true, my dear brethren, that this sublime Sacrament is a mystery, and that all mysteries are incomprehensible to sense and reason; but we must humbly submit our finite reason and understanding to the infallible word of God who being infinitely wise cannot be deceived, and being infinitely good cannot, in his turn, deceive. If God could create the world out of nothing, and if nothing is impossible with God, it certainly is not hard to believe that his omnipotence can change one thing into another. You all remember, dear Christians, how, at the request of his blessed Mother, he changed water into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana. Again, all the faithful, (and, indeed, many non-Catholics,) accept without dispute the truth that the divine and human natures are united in our Lord;—if, then, we believe Christ to be true God under the form of man, why can we not believe him true God and true man under the form of bread and wine, since he, himself, has said: "This is my body, . . . this is my blood?" As we believe him to have died under the form and appearance of a criminal on the cross, so we may and should believe him present in the holy Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine. As God the Holy Ghost, was seen of old under the form of a dove, and under the appearance of tongues of fire, so we may and ought to believe Christ our Lord and God to be present under the appearances of bread and wine. To assert that he is not really present under the sacramental species, is the greatest of all blasphemies; for it is nothing less than to accuse Jesus of telling an untruth. Did not Christ say with his own blessed lips: "This is my body, . . . this is my blood"? Had he said, on the other hand: "This is *not* my body, . . . this is *not* my blood,"—every rational person would conclude, that neither his body nor his blood was present in the holy Eucharist, since these words taken in their natural sense could convey no other idea; and shall not the words: "This is my body, . . . this is my

blood," which he actually made use of, have equal force, and indisputably prove to all that his body and his blood are really present in the Blessed Eucharist.

We must believe, my dear brethren, that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are really and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine, because he, the infallible Truth, has said it, and because his holy Church, the pillar and the ground of truth, has always taught it; and we must believe in the Real Presence with a stronger faith, than if we actually saw it with our own eyes; for our own eyes may deceive us, but God cannot deceive us. Hence, when some one came, on a certain occasion, to St. Louis, king of France, and told him that if he wished it, he might behold a miracle in a neighboring church where our Lord had appeared in the Blessed Sacrament under the image of a little child,—the holy monarch replied: "Let those who do not believe in the Real Presence, go and look at it; as for *me*, I not only believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is really present in the Sacrament of the altar, but I believe it more firmly than if I saw it with my bodily eyes!" And he remained where he was.

O, my beloved brethren! would that *we* possessed the lively faith of this devout king! Sometimes our senses really deceive us; sometimes things appear to us totally different from what they are in reality. Thus the sun seems to move around the earth, and yet, it is the earth that moves around the sun; but the holy Roman Catholic Church, alone, is infallible on earth; she can teach only that which Christ, her divine Spouse, has taught.

When Jesus had changed bread and wine into his body and blood, he gave it to his Apostles with these words: "Take ye, and eat, . . . . take ye, and drink;" and then he added: "Do this in commemoration of me." What these words signify is plain. Jesus hereby commanded his Apostles, after his death, to do what he had done, namely, to change bread and wine into his body and blood; to eat this heavenly manna themselves, and to give to others to eat. The natural inference is that Jesus Christ, when he gave his Apostles this command to do what he had done, also invested them with power and authority to consecrate bread and wine, and change them into his adorable body and blood. Suppose, a corpse had been brought that day into the Paschal supper-room, and Christ had said to one of his Apostles: "Go, and raise that dead man to life,"—what, my brethren, would that command have implied? Undoubtedly, that in those words Christ communicated to his Apostle the power of raising the dead man to life. This is a parallel case. When Jesus commanded his Apostles to do what he had done, namely, to change bread and wine into his body and blood, he surely invested them with the power and authority to execute that command.

But the commission: "Do this in commemoration of me," regards not only the Apostles, but, also, all their lawful successors in the priesthood. Christ intended his Church to exist to the end of time; hence, the means of

grace must exist to the end of time. It is by those means of grace that the Church conducts her children to salvation; if she was destitute of them, she could not save souls. Since Christ said to his Apostles: "Do this in commemoration of me," he wished to institute the mystery of his body and blood not only for the short life-time of his Apostles, but for all time, even to the consummation of the world. St. Paul expressly says so, when he adds to these words of Christ: "As often as you eat of this bread, or drink of this chalice, you shall show forth the death of the Lord until he come again," namely, until he come to judge the living and the dead. If this most holy Sacrament was to continue to the end of time, of necessity the power to change bread and wine into his body and blood was to continue to the end of time. But to whom did the Apostles commit this power? Most certainly to those whom they appointed as their successors in the priesthood. That this power might remain in the Church, and be spread over the whole world, the primitive Apostles not only ordained priests, but, also, consecrated bishops, who received in *their* turn the commission to ordain other priests and consecrate other bishops, and thus permanent provision was made by the Church that her priesthood might retain to the end of the world the miraculous power to consecrate bread and wine and change them into the body and blood of Christ.

The solemn moment, at which either a priest or a bishop exercises in the Mass this divine power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, is at the time of the Consecration. At that moment, they fulfil the commission of their divine Lord: "Do this in commemoration of me." Even as he, the great High-Priest, took bread into his sacred hands, so they take bread into their hands, and pronounce over it in his name and by his authority, his own blessed words: "This is my body." Then they take the chalice, as he also did, and say over the wine the same words he spoke at the Last Supper: "This is my blood." And as soon as the priest has pronounced these words, the bread and wine which were there the instant before, are no longer on the altar, but, (O marvelous miracle of the divine power and love!) the body and blood of Christ are there instead! Hence, my brethren, you behold at the Mass, the priest falling upon his knee to adore the hidden God; hence, you see him rising and elevating in turn the sacred host and the chalice, that the faithful may, also, adore their blessed Lord and Saviour. When the Consecration is perfected, Jesus remains present under the appearances of bread and wine, as long as the sacred species remain. He dwells in the tabernacle, where the consecrated hosts are preserved; he allows himself to be borne about in solemn procession; he gives himself to us in the form of bread for the nourishment of our souls, and is carried to the sick to become their viaticum. O, thanks and praises forever be to this most loving Lord for so many evidences of his unspeakable mercy and goodness!

You must not believe, my beloved brethren, that in the sacred host there is only the body of Christ without his precious blood, or that in the chalice there is only his precious blood, separated from his sacred body. Christ is present under each species, whole and entire, his flesh and blood, his body and soul, his divinity and humanity. Christ in the Blessed Eucharist is not divided; his flesh is with his blood, his body with his soul, and both are inseparably united with his divinity. He is present in the Sacrament of the altar, just as he sits at the right hand of God. Now, Christ in heaven, dear friends, is not in a state of death, but of life; flesh and blood, body and soul, divinity and humanity are not separated, but inseparably united. Hence, no separation can take place in this holy Sacrament, and consequently, under each species, whether of bread or wine, the body and blood of Christ are present with his soul and divinity. When you receive Communion you receive it, (it is true,) only under the species of bread, but, in receiving the sacred host, you receive not only his body, but with his body, his blood, his soul, his divinity. If one would receive Communion under the species of wine only, he would not receive the blood of Christ separated from the body, but united with the body, as well as with the soul and divinity of Christ.

In the Blessed Eucharist, Christ is not only whole and entire under each species, but in such a manner that he cannot be divided. When the priest breaks the host, he breaks only the species; the body of Christ is not broken,—only the species are divided. He is present whole and entire under each of the species, and under the smallest fragment of the species of bread as well as under the smallest drop of the species of wine. To illustrate this, my brethren, I will make use of a familiar example. You stand, for instance, before a large mirror, and you behold your image reflected in it. Break that mirror, the next moment, into a thousand pieces, and you will not thereby break your picture, but will see it reflected, whole and entire, in every part of the broken mirror.

In spite of all that has been said, or can be said, to demonstrate the truth of this august Sacrament, still the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist will always remain a great and incomprehensible mystery. Nevertheless, it suffices for us, dear Christians, to know that God can do greater things than we are able to comprehend; for, with God nothing is impossible. The Apostles could not comprehend how Jesus after his resurrection could enter the room in which they were assembled, the doors thereof being closed. In heaven we shall see and comprehend this and many other things which we do not comprehend at present. Here on earth, my beloved, we must merit heaven by humble faith.

Far, then, from wavering in our faith, or disbelieving the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, because we do not see him in the flesh with our corporal eyes, because we do not behold him invested with all the insignia of his infinite majesty; far from being incredulous, like the

apostle Thomas, because we do not feel the print of the nails, or actually put our hands into the wound in his adorable Side, let us submit our senses, reason and understanding to the infallible word of our Lord Jesus Christ and believe upon his divine authority what we neither see nor comprehend, that we may be entitled to the blessing which he has promised with his own sacred lips to those who believe although they do not see. Amen.

O.S.B.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

## FREQUENT COMMUNION.

*“This is the bread descending down from heaven; that if any one eat of it, he may not die.” John 6: 50.*

The most precious nourishment of the soul, my beloved brethren, is the Blessed Eucharist, the figure of which we see in the miraculous bread of the Gospel of to-day. Thousands and thousands of Christians continually travel the pathway of life, their course being directed to the land of eternity. Jesus, our divine Saviour, being in the midst of them, being really present in the Holy Eucharist, gives them the miraculous Bread of heaven, that they may not faint in their journey, but press on, as Elias did, to the Mount Horeb of their desires. He nourishes them with his own body and blood, “that if any one eat of it, he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread which I will give, is my flesh for the life of the world.” John 6: 51, 52. The bread, then, which we receive in holy Communion, is not really bread like that with which our Lord fed the five thousand men in the desert, but the body and blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine. This is a grace bestowed upon us, my dear brethren, of which even the Angels are not deemed worthy; for, they are only allowed to behold and worship Jesus, not to receive him. Yet, what effect does this miraculous bread produce in us who are thus favored? “If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.” We have here our Lord’s word for it, (the word of Eternal Truth,) that *the effect of holy Communion is life everlasting.* He that communicates worthily, preserves the *life of grace* upon earth; for holy Communion has the special effect of preserving us from mortal sin which destroys the life of grace, or, in other words, which kills the soul by depriving it of its true life which is sanctifying grace. This is, because holy Communion, my dear brethren, on the one hand weakens our predominant passions and our natural propensity to evil, and, on the other, because it strengthens us and enables us to overcome all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He that preserves *the life of grace upon earth* has the assurance of Christ that he shall receive *life everlasting in heaven.* Therefore, by holy Communion we become partakers of the two greatest goods man can wish for: *Sanctifying grace, and life everlasting.*

And, yet, there are many Christians who have not the least desire for holy Communion, who absent themselves from the table of the Lord for a

whole year, and would not even communicate at Easter, if they were not, as it were, compelled to do so by the precept of the Church. O, my beloved brethren, I implore of you, do not follow in the footsteps of these lukewarm, negligent Christians; on the contrary, esteem yourselves happy that you have the opportunity of approaching frequently to the holy Communion. But, at the same time, at every Communion think of the words of the Apostle: "Let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." 1. Cor. 11: 28, 29.

The Blessed Eucharist is the principal object of our divine worship, and the religious life of a Christian is measured by his devotion to this holy Sacrament, this treasure of the Altar. That your devotion to it, my brethren, may be still further enkindled, I will furnish you, to-day, with some reasons why you should receive holy Communion frequently. These reasons I will preceed to show you are drawn

- I. *From the design of our Lord Jesus Christ in instituting this Sacrament;*
- II. *From the many wants of our souls, and*
- III. *From the universal example of the early Christians.*

I. "I have compassion on the multitude," says Jesus, "for, behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat." Mark. 8: 2. "I have compassion on the multitude," said Jesus, when he was about to become incarnate for the redemption of the world. "I have compassion on the multitude," he said, when being obliged to return to heaven, he had recourse to this admirable means of remaining with us under the species of bread and wine, whilst at the same time, he could be reigning in Paradise with the Angels and Saints. God had shown a great grace to the Israelites in the desert, where he daily fed them with manna from on high, but how infinitely greater is the grace which we receive in holy Communion where we receive Christ himself, the Incarnate God, the same adorable One who sitteth at the right hand of his Eternal Father in heaven. Fearing that his children, wandering through the desert of this life, might faint in the way, like the famished people of old, he gave them this miraculous Bread for their support. Actuated by this tender love, by this ardent desire to become our food under the form of bread and wine, he said when he was about to institute this memorial of his infinite Love: "With desire I have desired to eat this paschal lamb with you, before I suffer."

If the great king of heaven and earth longs for the possession of our souls, should we not, my brethren, invite him to come frequently under our roof? Can we call ourselves with truth the friends of Jesus, if we have

no desire to visit that divine Friend,—if we allow an entire year to pass without receiving our Redeemer? How great was the love for Jesus by which his true friends were animated! Mary, the sister of Lazarus, arose in haste when she heard of the Lord's coming, and went forth with ardent eagerness to welcome him. Zacheus descended from the tree as soon as he was informed that Jesus wished to enter his house; and he, the sinner, became a devout son of Abraham.

Our desire for the holy Communion should increase, my dear Christians, when we reflect upon the nature of this divine food itself. Jesus chose our daily nourishment, bread and wine, to be the species of his body and blood. Could he have expressed his desire of being united with us in a more touching or more persuasive manner? This bread is not only to be the form and species, under which Jesus is intimately united with us, but it is to be, at the same time, a memorial of his sacred Passion and death: “For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice you shall show forth the death of the Lord, until he come.” 1. Cor. 11: 26. If we humbly adore our crucified Jesus, and recognize his love for us upon the cross in yielding up his precious life for our sakes,—let us reflect, my brethren, that his love in the holy Eucharist is, so to say, a continual Passion and death for us.—If we were to hear of this Blessed Sacrament for the first time on this day, how great would be our admiration, and how ardent our love! If we have no desire to receive this greatest of all treasures, we are surely in a most deplorable condition, and we have reason to fear that the men of Ninive and the queen of Sheba will rise in judgment against us.

II. Every creature needs food for the preservation of its life, and expects it from the hand of God. “All expect of thee, O Lord, that thou give them food in season.” (Ps. 103: 28.) Man expects of God his food for both body and soul. Now, all the wants of our souls, my dear Christians, are satiated by this angelical food. The strongest of all an immortal spirit's desires is that of union with the infinite God, with the adorable spouse of its affections. By holy Communion, the Son of God descends into our hearts, that we may possess him in this earthly life. Ever since man was cast out of Paradise, his soul has felt an ardent longing to behold once more the face of her Lord, to attain, once more, to an intimate union with the Deity. This hope animated the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets, and spurred on the most zealous of the people of Israel. This desire, (perverted, alas! from its sublime origin,) led the nations so far astray as to make idols with their own hands, and worship them as gods.

By holy Communion, my dear brethren, Jesus descends into our hearts really and substantially, and strengthens our souls against the power of sin and the attacks of the devil. As the destroying angel passed by those houses which were sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb, so the

devil dares not enter a soul that has just received worthily the body of the Lord in holy Communion, that is signed, indeed, with the blood of the true Paschal Lamb, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. This divine Sacrament, beloved Christians, also sows in our souls the seed of all virtues, rendering us more like to God, and preparing us for our eternal union with him in heaven. It is “the corn of the elect, and the wine which maketh to spring forth virgins.” (Zach. 9: 17.) It fosters our spiritual life in Jesus Christ, and is a pledge of life everlasting: “If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.” (John 6: 52.) Nevertheless, in spite of all this, my dear brethren, can it be possible that you feel no ardent desire for the holy Communion? Why are you thus careless? I say to you, as Jacob said to his sons: “I have heard that wheat is sold in Egypt. Go ye down, and buy us necessaries that we may live and not be consumed with want.” (Gen. 43: 2.) Why do you delay procuring for your souls this most necessary Food? Why do you defer approaching this treasure? “All you that thirst, come to the waters; and you that have no money, make haste, buy and eat; come ye, buy wine and milk without money, and without any price.” (Is. 55: 1.)

You say, perhaps, that your daily pursuits absorb all your time, so that you find no leisure to go to holy Communion. What a pity, that you have no time to go to holy Communion! Have you, then, no time on Sundays and holy days? You have time for every thing, time for every body else, but, alas! you have no time for holy Communion or for the entertainment of your only true friend, Jesus! I wonder if you will find time to die. Remember, that your principal pursuit on earth is to save your soul, and to obtain heaven. All other things are not the end, but only the means to the end. As those who are engaged in hard bodily labor are often obliged to renew their strength by good nourishment, so those who are much engaged in worldly business are greatly in need of the grace and strength of this Sacrament. But, again, perhaps you say, that *you feel yourselves unworthy* of approaching frequently the table of the Lord. Remember, that *no one is worthy*, and that only the grace of God can prepare our souls for the reception of this august Sacrament. Divine grace being imparted to us by holy Communion, it is clear that your preparation is the more defective, the longer you stay away from the table of the Lord. Must you not admit, my dear brethren, that whenever your souls are strengthened with this heavenly Bread, the fire of divine love is enkindled anew in your hearts? And does it not follow that frequent Communion would render your souls every time you approach, worthier of your divine Guest? Alas! “your heart is withered, because you forgot to eat your bread.” Ps. 101: 5.

III. Many Christians of these days receive holy Communion only once or twice a year, and that is a practice, my dear friends, which was utterly unknown to the early Christians. The Acts of the Apostles relate of the

three thousand converts who were baptized on Pentecost that they were persevering in the communication of the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Of the Christians at Corinth, St. Paul says, that they daily attended the divine sacrifice and received holy Communion. St. Anaclete, the Roman Pontiff, speaks also of the daily Communion of the faithful. The Christians during the ages of persecution, carried the Bread of Angels to their houses, that they might not be deprived of it, when hindered from attending divine service. The great doctor, St. Basil, relates that in his time, the faithful used to go to Communion four times a week. St. Epiphanius mentions the custom of receiving holy Communion three times a week. St. Jerome relates the same with regard to the Spanish churches. When this holy and wide-spread zeal threatened to abate, the Fathers of the Church, (as St. Ambrose and St. Chrysostom,) employed all the strength of their eloquence to arouse in lukewarm Christians their ancient spirit of devotion. In later times, when the faithful had fallen still further from their first fervor, the Church established the law of annual Communion as the extreme limit of her children's absence from the Sacraments, a precept which no one is allowed to transgress, and remain a member of the Church. Our holy Mother has, nevertheless, repeatedly expressed her wish to see her children frequently strengthened by this heavenly Bread; and the Fathers assembled at the Council of Trent desired that the faithful should receive holy Communion at every Mass they attended. Nor was there any difference in point of fervent zeal between men and women in the early days of Christianity. All, without exception, approached frequently and fervently to the adorable Sacrament of the altar. Now-a-days, men are very careless in this respect, although it was to *our* sex, to the Apostles at the Last Supper, that our blessed Lord first gave his divine body and blood in the Holy Eucharist.

We all may die, my dear brethren, at any moment. We all have good reason to pray each night, before retiring to rest: "O Lord, if this night is to be my last night, pray, forget and forsake me not!" We are struck with terror when we hear that some friend or relative has been suddenly snatched away from us by death. Our chief consolation in such cases is found in a satisfactory answer to the questions: "When was he at confession last? When did he receive his last Communion?" Oh! then, my beloved Christians, let us in our own case admit of no lukewarmness, no tepidity in the affair of salvation. Let us frequently and reverently receive this blessed Bread of heaven, that we may not faint in the way, but that, strengthened with its celestial nourishment, we may with Elias ascend to the holy mountain of God.

JOSEPH EHRLER, Bishop of Spire.

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## FIFTH FRIDAY OF LENT.

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DELAY NOT YOUR REPENTANCE.

*“To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Ps. 94: 8.*

The sinner, my beloved brethren, is often to be pitied. He perceives his spiritual misery; he knows that he stands upon the brink of hell, and that the next moment may precipitate him into its abyss, making him miserable for all eternity; and yet, he will not take hold of the hand of God, which is gladly stretched forth at all times, to rescue him from perdition. . . . And yet, he refuses to embrace that saving mercy. He will tell you, perhaps, that he intends some day to do so, but not now, later on, when he has grown older and wiser. What does the Spirit of God say to this? “Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder. Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin to sin. And say not: the mercy of God is great; he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath quickly come from him; and his wrath looketh upon sinners. Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For his wrath will come on a sudden; and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.” (Eccles. 5: 4-9.) Again, St. Paul gives voice to a similar rebuke: “Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness, and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God.” (Rom. 2: 4, 5.) Therefore, my dear brethren, I cry out to you with emphasis—and Oh, that I could engrave these words with an iron pencil upon the tablet of your souls!—“*To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*” Delay not to be converted to the Lord, for if you defer your conversion from day to day,

- I. *You risk everything, and*
- II. *In the end, you lose everything.*

I. *You risk everything.* What do you risk?

1. *The greatest graces.*

a) *The longanimity of God.* It is most certainly one of the greatest of God's graces to the sinner, when he bears with him with indulgence and

patience. Consider only, my dear brethren, what an infinite outrage mortal sin is, and you will not be able to contain your astonishment that God defers its condign punishment even one single hour after its commission. . . . But God waits for the despiser of his supreme majesty, not only for the space of a single hour, but from year to year, and, often, on through the extended course of a long and sinful life. “I have always held my peace; I have kept silence; I have been patient,” says the Mighty One, speaking through his prophet. (Is. 52: 14.) And, again, by the same lips: “The Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you.” (Is. 30: 18.) Ponder, also, my brethren, the thrilling parable of the barren fig-tree: “Behold,” said the master of the vineyard to his laborer, “behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore; why doth it take up the ground?” (Luke 13: 7.) Terrible command! full of dread significance for the slothful Christian! How long has God already waited for *you*, my brethren? For many years, perhaps for half a century. And you still delay to be converted to him? You will not yet confess your sins, nor avoid the occasions of sin, nor relinquish your bad habits, nor restore your ill-gotten goods? How presumptuously you play with the long-suffering patience of God! How quickly it may all end for you,—perhaps to-morrow, perhaps to-day. “The lord of that servant shall come in a day that he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not; and shall separate him, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 24: 50, 51.)

b) *The mercy of God.* Like his long-suffering patience, my brethren, the mercy of God is an inconceivably great grace. Ah, who is God, and who is the sinner? God, the Sovereign Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier—God the infinite Power, the infinite Wisdom, the infinite and ineffable Goodness! Man, the work of his hands, the slave whom he has redeemed,—weakness, darkness, wickedness—worms, ashes, and corruption! Yet this great God, before whom a thousand years are as a day, and royal crowns like the dust in the road, offers mercy and pardon to that vile sinner, to the betrayer of his majesty, to the despiser of his most holy Name! Will you, then, dare to sport with this mercy of the Most High? The ancient prophet, inspired by *his* wisdom, cries out to you: “Return to the Lord, thy God; for thou hast fallen down by thy iniquity.” (Osee 14: 2.) But you retort with the hard-hearted, stiff-necked people of old: “Command, command again; command, command again; expect, expect again; expect, expect again; a little there, a little there.” (Is. 28: 10.) Will this long-abused mercy of God not be exhausted some time, my brethren, and, alas, when you least expect it? “Mercy and wrath are with him. He is mighty to forgive and to pour out indignation. According as his mercy is, so his correction judgeth a man according to his works.” (Eccles. 16: 12, 13.)

*You risk everything.* What do you risk?

2. *The highest goods.*

a) *Your immortal soul.* Who would doubt that the soul of man is an infinitely precious good? Man's soul is God's image and likeness. (Gen. 1: 26.) And its value, its price, its ransom, the blood of a God, the blood of the Second divine Person of the ever adorable Trinity, made man for love of us. "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible gold and silver from your vain conversation of the tradition of your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled." (1. Pet. 1: 18, 19.) The devil is willing to give all the kingdoms of the world for the priceless pearl of one immortal soul: "All these will I give thee, if, falling down, thou wilt adore me." (Matt. 4: 9.) For your soul's sake, my beloved brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ has been crucified. And you will deliberately risk the loss of that precious, dearly-bought treasure! You are well aware that the unconverted soul, the soul in the state of mortal sin, will be lost for ever. Yet, as long as you delay to be converted to the Lord, this terrible danger threatens you; and threatens you, moreover, every day, every moment. Will you thus risk that other great good, to wit:

b) *Your salvation?* Can you doubt for a moment that salvation is a most excellent good? My dear brethren, it is the substance and the essence of all good; it is, in short, the highest good, completing man's felicity for all eternity. "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house," says king David, "and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of pleasure." (Ps. 35: 9.) "That city into which we are to enter," exclaims the great bishop of Hippo, "differs from our earthly habitation, as the light of the sun and of the moon differs from the light of him who created the sun and the moon." (St. Aug. *De civitate Dei*) "In the eternal beatitude," adds the same learned author in another of his works, "you find everything you love; and you can desire nothing that will not be there." (St. Aug. *De Trin.*) And *this* felicity, you have the blind temerity to risk? Faith teaches, my dear Christians, that man has no claim to heaven, so long as he lives in the state of mortal sin. From this it follows that, if you delay your conversion, you are continually in danger of forfeiting your eternal salvation.

II. If you delay to be converted to the Lord, if you defer your conversion from day to day, you risk everything and, *in the end, lose everything.* How is this?

1. *You may die suddenly and unexpectedly.*

a) *Think of the many dangers.* Nothing is menaced in this world as much as our natural life. Everything about us, dear brethren, has an occult power which, if exercised, can bring us to a sudden death. The sun, beautiful and bright as it is, may inflame your brain and cause apoplexy. If you walk by the sea-shore or go to bathe in its waters, a powerful wave may carry you away beyond your depth and drown you. If you traverse the streets of the city, and pass a building in course of erection, a stone or a board may fall upon your head, and crush it out of all semblance of humanity. A pistol-shot from some rough crowd at the corner may pierce your heart on your way home. The house in which you live may fall down, and bury you in its ruins. The staircase, as you go up or down, may break, and cause your destruction. In the midst of a thunderstorm, the lightning may strike and kill you. You may be thrown out of your buggy, and your neck broken on the spot. Travelling, you may lose your life by a collision on the railroad, or the explosion of a steamboat-boiler. But who, my brethren, could ever enumerate all the different kinds of death that continually menace life? "There is but one step (as I may say) between me and death." (1. Kings 20: 3.) "Remember," says the Wise Man, "that death is not slow, and that the covenant of hell," (the decree by which all are to go down to the regions of death,) "hath been shewn thee; for, the covenant of this world shall surely die." (Eccles. 14: 2.) In short: "It is appointed for men once to die." (Hebr. 9: 27.) Reflect, then, my dear Christians,

b) *How little security is yours.* Do you say to me: "Yes, but I am now young and strong"? *Youth* is no security against death. Young people may die, as well as the old. How many die in the bloom of youth and health? Does not the holy Scripture tell us of the death of the young man of Naim,—of the sad taking-off of the fair young daughter of Jairus? One cold frost in the early autumn blights the fairest blossoms and flowers of summer. *Strength* is no security against death. A violent storm breaks down the strongest trees. Nay, more, the great tall tree is a surer mark for the tempest than the frail little fern growing at its foot. Lazarus, the strong man, was striken down by mortal disease even in the midst of a loving and attentive circle of relatives and friends. Neither is health any security against death, my brethren. Here to-day, and away to-morrow. How many have gone to bed at night in good health, and have been found dead in the morning! How many have arisen in good spirits in the morning, have taken their breakfasts, and gone about their business; and, yet, were cold, and stiff, and dead the same evening! "Man knoweth not his own end," says the inspired Writer, (Eccles. 9: 12,) and again: "Boast not of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what the day to come may bring forth." (Prov. 27: 1.) "God," remarks a celebrated doctor of the Church, "has not revealed to us the hour of death." (St. Gregory.) And if you, in

your turn, my brethren, should die suddenly,—(for what has happened to thousands of others, may easily happen to you;) if death should steal upon you unawares, “like a thief in the night,” as our Lord has foretold,—and if it should not find you watching, you may lose everything and for ever! But let us suppose that a sudden death should not overtake you,—there may still be something else much more terrible in store for you.

2. *You may die unprepared,*

a) *Because of your own fault.* As a rule, sickness precedes death, my brethren, and sickness is an urgent warning from God, pressing you to be converted to him. But very often that salutary warning is in vain, because you do not realize your danger. You regard death as something far off, something remote, which may come to you at a future day, but not just *then*. You have every hope of recovery from your sickness; a fond delusion, in which those who surround you, your physician, your relatives, your friends, with cruel kindness encourage you. Thus it comes to pass that the reception of the last Sacraments is deferred,—perhaps, not even thought of. Finally, the solemn moment of dissolution arrives. The cheek grows deadly white—the death-sweat trickles down,—the eyes stare wildly; and, lo! the cry is made: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him.” (Matt. 25: 6.) Alas! the lamp is empty; there is no time to fill it; “the door is shut.” (Matt. 25: 10.) It is now too late to go in with the happy faithful virgins to the banquet of eternal bliss!—Or, my brethren, even if you know your danger, you may decline to make good use of it. Many dying persons cannot help but see that their end is near, but they refuse even in that supreme moment, to reach out their arms to their crucified Redeemer, they refuse to embrace the last pleading overtures of the mercy of God. Sham repentance or no repentance at all, are the customary characteristics of such miserable death-beds. And it is of such sinners that the Lord complains: “I knew that thou art stubborn, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy forehead of brass.” (Is. 48: 4.)

Again, my brethren, you may die wilfully unconverted

b) *By the just judgment of God.* Sometimes it is decreed in the divine councils that the sinner perish. Many passages of the Sacred Scripture seem to indicate this. “It was the sentence of the Lord, that their hearts should be hardened, and they should not deserve any clemency, and should be destroyed.” (Josue 11: 20.) “I will laugh in their destruction, and will mock.” (Prov. 1: 26.) “You shall die in your sins.” (John 8: 25.) O, my brethren, how terrible, how awe-inspiring, are these sentences? God always offers sufficient grace to the sinner, with which, if he earnestly willed it, he could save his soul. But he lacks the earnest, persevering will, and

hence, the sufficient grace profits him nothing; he perishes in the end through his own fault. And if *you*, my brethren, should thus play with the grace of God, if you should go out of this world in the state of sin,—(and such may easily happen,)—you, too, will lose both soul and salvation. In hell, alas! the reprobate sinner may shed torrents of tears for those lost, those priceless goods, but nevermore shall he find the saving grace and mercy which he abused, and scorned, and outraged here on earth!

Therefore, dear Christians, delay not your repentance. Do not believe the devil when he suggests to you: “At a later period you may do penance for your sins.” Do not believe the world which says to you: “Wait a little yet.” Believe not even your own heart, when it says to you: “Later on.” —But listen to these words: “To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Amen.

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## PASSION SUNDAY.

## ON THE NATURE OF SIN.

*“Which of you shall convince me of sin?” John 8: 46.*

Thus our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, essentially just and holy, speaks to the Jews, to the Scribes and Pharisees, who would not listen to his word, nor believe in his doctrine. If either in my words or in my actions, (so he seems to say to his enemies), you find aught that is evil or blame-worthy, you might be excused for condemning me, but now you have no excuse for your malice, since you cannot convince me of sin, you cannot point out any fault in me. Would to God, my beloved Christians, that we could say before God: “Which of you shall convince me of sin?”—But, alas! is it not true that we have cause to blush because of the number and grievousness of our transgressions? Have we not cause to tremble when we remember how often we have refused to listen to the teachings of him who came into the world for pure love of us to save us by his blood from sin and the consequences of sin, endless misery and eternal damnation? If we but rightly understood the nature of sin, we would, it seems to me, conceive such a hatred and detestation of all that offends so good and loving a God, that with St. Catharine of Sienna we would tremble with fear at the very sight of it, and shun it as we would shun some dangerous monster that threatens to devour us. For this reason, my brethren, I have resolved to explain to you, to-day, the nature of sin in general. May our dear Lord who bled for us upon the cross to wash away all sin, grant, through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mother, that we may understand what sin really is; and in this holy season of penance, obtaining pardon and forgiveness for the past, and abhorring sin for the future, henceforth declare war against it, and every one of its occasions.

- I. What is sin?*
- II. In what does the nature of sin properly consist? and*
- III. Why should not a rational creature, even without being blest with the light of Faith, detest it?*

Behold these three questions which, with God’s holy grace, I propose to answer in this instruction. But first, permit me to warn you, dear brethren, against a common temptation suggested by the arch-enemy of souls, when seemingly simple subjects are threatened of in the pulpit,—the temptation to

take it for granted that you already know and understand all that can be said on the subject in hand; and, hence, that it is of no great interest to you to listen. For the love of Jesus Christ, for the love of your immortal souls, I beg of you to pay no attention to these suggestions of the evil one, or these promptings of self-love, and, with your usual good dispositions, follow my reasonings on this very important subject.

I. *What is sin?* I ask, and even the little child will answer without hesitation, (the good Christian father and mother having repeated it to him, hundreds of times, from the catechism): “*Sin is any thought, word, action, or omission contrary to the law of God.*” The answer, indeed, is correct, but is it understood? In order not to burden your minds with theological distinctions, I shall add one word to your definition; and, to make it still easier of comprehension, I will cut off several superfluous words, and say: “*Sin is a wilful transgression of the law of God.*” I will explain. In order that a thought, a word, an action, or omission, be imputed to us as a moral evil,—for which, as rational creatures, we know that we deserve punishment,—it must be wilful and deliberate; from which it follows that such as have no knowledge of what they do, or who, by main force, are compelled to do certain things, or through necessity are obliged to omit certain things, of course cannot commit sin. Persons in their sleep, or who, by reason of other causes beyond their control, are unconscious of what they are doing, cannot be capable of any *wilful* transgression, or voluntary violation of the law of God. The knowledge or consciousness of the act or the omission, is, however, not yet sufficient to constitute a moral guilt, or a wilful transgression, such as is necessary for sin. The act or omission must be known to the person who commits or omits it, as commanded or forbidden by the divine law. Hence, if one does not really know, if one is ignorant without his own fault, of the laws of God, or of his Church,—such a one does not commit sin by transgressing those laws. This should be, (and always has been), a great consolation to those good, pious, and God-fearing souls who, with all their hearts, detest sin and wish to love and serve their divine Master. Not seldom does it happen that we hear them say: “As soon as I entered into myself, I banished that evil thought.”—“I forgot that it was a fast day, or I would not have broken the precept of the Church.”—“I could not possibly help this or that feeling coming over me;”—all of which, my dear brethren, constituted no sin at all, since there was really no will to commit sin. Yet, on the other hand, let not this plea of ignorance or inadvertence be made by those who have given themselves such a habit of wilfully transgressing the divine law that they do it without thinking. They, indeed, often wish to screen themselves, saying: “O, I did not mean it,”—“I was in a passion,”—“I forgot.” The very habit in them is voluntary and wilful, and until they have efficaciously determined to break themselves of that habit, its results

will be accounted as voluntary and sinful. Neither can those who neglect the opportunity given them to be instructed, plead ignorance of the law as a sufficient excuse; their ignorance being sinful, the actions proceeding from such ignorance must necessarily be laid to their charge as voluntary, if not directly, at least indirectly, since they, themselves, are alone to blame for the evil of those forbidden actions.

II. The second word to be explained in our definition, dear friends, is *transgression*, that is: disobeying, doing or not doing as the law or commandment requires. This disobedience of the law may be accompanied with greater or less knowledge of the law itself; or the matter commanded or forbidden may be greater or smaller according to circumstances. On all this, it depends, my brethren, whether a sin be mortal or venial.

It must, moreover, be a transgression of the law of God, for there can be no offence against God, and, hence, no sin, unless God is disobeyed, his law disregarded. Again, all human laws, ecclesiastical and civil, must be based on the eternal law of God and be conformable thereto. All law in opposition to the eternal law of God, is in opposition to God himself; and so far from becoming guilty of sin in transgressing such a law or command, we would, on the contrary, offend God by obeying it.

Before I proceed to show the evil of sin, I must remind you, dear Christians, that God, as the Supreme Master and Lord of all things, has full right to confer upon or delegate to whomsoever he pleases, the power to make laws in conformity to his eternal law. Moreover, that he has established a law by which, not only the exterior actions of men, but also their interior, their very thoughts and desires, are to be governed. Neither the Church nor the civil government judges or punishes the intentions or thoughts of a criminal, but God, to whom the secrets of the heart are known, from whose all-seeing eye nothing is hidden, will judge man for whatever proceeds from the intellect, the memory, and the will. The whole man belongs to God. He has given him the powers of his soul, and he has established the laws by which those powers shall be governed. To men, he has delegated the power of judging the actions, and punishing the transgressors who *exteriously disregard the laws made for them*, but God, himself, judges the heart and the thoughts of man.

Sin, then, (as has been sufficiently stated,) is a voluntary transgression, whether by thought or otherwise, of the law of God. In order, now, my brethren, to understand the nature of such a transgression, we must consider the following points:

I. Who is this God whom we disobey when we disregard his law? Who is God? He is at once our Creator and Lord, our supreme Master and just Judge, our loving Saviour and merciful Father. He is essentially good in himself, infinitely good to us, his rational creatures, his favored

children. The laws which he has given for our government, if observed, will make us happy for time and eternity. As Creator, he has the most absolute and unquestionable right to say why he has created us, and what he wants us to do. As Lord and Master of the universe, he cannot with impunity permit his laws or commands to be disregarded, nor the homage due him to be given to another. "I am," says he, "the Lord, thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me." As a powerful sovereign, he is entitled to our submission without reserve, for we are his subjects; and as a loving Father, he is entitled to the tender and loving obedience of faithful children. Being a severe, as well as an omniscient Judge, the Scrutinizer of hearts, the Searcher of the secrets of men,—we should tremble at the thought of offending him for fear of the terrible punishment which awaits those who dread not his anger. That great and powerful God forbids me by his eternal law, (the echo of which I hear within me, forbidding all sensual excess), to injure my health, or waste my substance, to yield to carnal desires, to nameless vices or passions; and, (I ask), who am *I* that I should say: "*Non serviam*—I will not obey!"—?

Who art thou, O man, who refusest obedience to God? Who art thou, or what art thou, O sinner! who darest knowingly with open eyes, fully aware of the consequences of such criminal rashness, to transgress the commandments of thy God? A worm crushed to death by the traveller on the highway, is of more consequence, compared with him that crushes it, than man is, compared to the God whom he outrages by his sin. Poor wretched creature, totally dependent on that infinite and all-powerful Creator and Ruler,—he can do nothing of himself. His every step, his every motion, his every breath, his very existence, are in the hands of the God whom he offends. It is true, indeed, that man is a noble creature, because God has endowed him with qualities and gifts, far above the brute creation. He has given him powers by which the impress of God himself is left upon his immortal soul, for "he has made man to his own image and likeness." (Gen. 1: 26.) And it is precisely because of these powers and faculties that man becomes wretched and miserable, if he refuses to respect and obey the Supreme Giver of all good. By his understanding, man knows right from wrong; he can distinguish virtue from vice, good from evil. He is well aware that whatever gifts he has received are intended by the Giver to be used according to God's holy will; he knows that at any moment, that same God can deprive him of whatever he has given him, yea, even of life and existence itself,—in a word, that he can annihilate him. Yet, notwithstanding this knowledge, man when he commits sin, arrays himself against God, and arrogantly says, if not by words, at least by his actions: "I will not serve, I will not obey God." God says: "Forgive your enemies;" man says: "I will not." God says: "Love your neighbor as yourself;" man says: "I will not." Jesus Christ says: "Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;"

man says: "I expect to go to heaven in the end,"—although he knows at the same time, that his heart is utterly void of childlike purity, humility, and simplicity; is full of arrogance, self-conceit, and pride. God says: "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away;" man says: "You will see that I will bear it away by seeking my own comfort and ease, and by yielding to my evil passions." God, in fine, says: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain. . . . Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day. . . . Thou shalt not steal. . . . Thou shalt not commit adultery. . . . Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor;" but man says: "I will not serve, I will not obey; God may command, God may threaten, I will *not* serve him!" O, my brethren! and what is it that man thus prefers to God? To what end does he so basely disobey his Creator, his Redeemer?

Yes, why or for what reason, does man transgress the law of his God? Have you, my dear brethren, ever reflected seriously on this question: Why did I commit this sin? why did I disobey God, (as I knew that I did), by transgressing that commandment, that precept? Why did you, my friend, at the least provocation, give way to excessive anger and vindictiveness? Why did you yield to the inordinate desires of the flesh, or to the unlawful cravings of the appetite? Why did you listen and consent to the suggestions of pride, vain-glory, envy, or jealousy? Have you, I ask, ever seriously considered that little word "*Why*"? Behold! there are here two masters in question, two opposite laws. On the one hand, a living God and Father who says: "My child, give me thy heart;" a rich Lord and a most bountiful and liberal Master who promises you a reward to which nothing on earth can be compared. A Master who has done for you what no earthly monarch could do: "What more could I have done to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" And, on the other hand, behold a hard and severe master, a cruel tyrant, poor and unable to give you anything. This master importunes you, and under false and delusive promises induces you, to transgress the command of your God and Father, and to obey him instead. What do you do when you commit sin? For the sake of the momentary pleasure or satisfaction which you find in yielding to the suggestions of that cruel master, you set aside and disobey the just and equitable laws of your God. If there were question between man and man,—if a good, loving, and liberal master were to command, a master on whose will your happiness, your very life depended; whilst another, harsh and tyrannical, by flattery and deceit, and through jealousy and hatred, should forbid you to obey, would you, my dear brethren, for the slightest reason, listen to the pretensions of such a usurper, and transgress the order of him whom you have vowed to obey? Would you knowingly and wilfully do anything to provoke him to anger who has the power to make you miserable for life, nay, more, for eternity? Assuredly not, you say; to act thus, would be the part of a madman. And, yet, far more unworthy of a

rational creature who believes in the existence of a God infinitely holy, good, and just, is the conduct of him who voluntarily transgresses the law of that God, preferring the suggestions of his unruly passions to the dictates of reason and the voice of conscience.

“I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised me.” (Is. 1: 2.) Thus the Lord, by the prophet, complains of his unfaithful and ungrateful children. As a father, I have done for man what I could. I have raised him far above all the other creatures of the earth. I have given him the use of all I have created; and I only ask in return that he should obey me. I do not require anything that is hard or impossible, “for my yoke is sweet, and my burden light.” (Matt. 11: 30.) I have even promised to help and assist him in carrying that burden. I have promised him happiness and contentment in this life, and eternal glory hereafter. I have, moreover, given him the light of reason and understanding by which he may clearly recognize my will; yet, he has despised me. He has preferred to listen to mine and his enemies, whose aim is to plunge him into eternal misery. Will you, my dear Christians, be of that number? Will you sinfully despise God and his holy law by following your own corrupt inclinations? God forbid! And if in the past—may be, (we will hope,) more or less unaware of the malice of your sin,—you have unfortunately strayed from the path of virtue, to-day, at last, resolve to obey God in all things; to-day, this very moment, here and now, declare and begin war against whatever might induce you to sin. In short, detest sin and from your hearts, abhor and shun it,—the only real evil you should dread here below. May our dear Lord, who in the holy sacrifice of the Mass is offered for us to his Eternal Father, grant us all the grace, henceforth, in all things to faithfully obey his holy law and that of his divine Spouse, the Church, in the spirit of true children, that in the end, we may be found worthy, by his grace, to inherit the kingdom prepared for us in the realms of eternal bliss. Amen.

Rev. L. BAX.

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**PASSION SUNDAY.**

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THE DANGER AND DETRIMENT TO THE SINNER FROM THE DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

*“Which of you shall convince me of sin?” John 8: 46.*

Only a few days more, my beloved brethren, and the great Victim shall be slain, heaven reconciled with earth, the power of hell destroyed, and man redeemed by that adorable One “who did no sin, . . . who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice.” (1. Pet. 2: 22, 24.) But what benefit, what advantage, will the Redemption be to us, dear Christians, if we do not make ourselves partakers of its precious fruits? In vain, will the blood of the Victim flow for us in streams; in vain, will the Lamb of God be slain for us on the altar of the Cross; in vain, will he sit at the right hand of God as our advocate with the Father, if we, by our carelessness, by our forgetfulness of God and of our salvation, slothfully defer our conversion from day to day. There are many among us who know and acknowledge that they are sinners, and who will assure you that they fully intend to be converted to the Lord; not, it is true, at present, but at some future convenient time,—perhaps, on their death-bed. Such procrastinators may be compared to those sick persons who are willing to admit the serious nature of their malady, but who, nevertheless, delay applying the proper remedies from one time to another, till death cries out to them: “It is now too late: ‘time shall be no more’!” The Church, in her solicitude for all her children, earnestly admonishes us during this holy season to secure our salvation, enjoining on us again and again the duty of receiving the holy Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist. How many such seasons of mercy and grace, my brethren, have you not already suffered to glide away unprofitably to yourselves! How many such acceptable times, such golden days of salvation, have you not lived to see! Perhaps, you have become gray, your hair has been bleached by the frosts of care and old age; your heads are bowed with years, and your eyes look down into the open grave which lies close at your feet;—and still, after all, you delay your repentance from day to day. What are you waiting for? Let me warn you, my dear brethren, whilst you have yet time to devote to the affair of your salvation; for time will soon be no more for you. “To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” (Ps. 94: 8.) “Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not, (your conversion), from day to day;” (Eccles. 5: 8,) for, I assure you, that

- I. Great is the danger, and*
- II. Great is the detriment of such a delay.*

I. If you consider the tremendous risks to which you foolishly and carelessly expose yourselves, dear Christians, I cannot believe that you would wilfully defer your conversion to the future; since there is no imaginable danger greater or more certain than this.

The Psalmist cries out to us in words of solemn warning: “Except you will be converted, he will brandish his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. And in it he hath prepared the instruments of death, he hath made ready his arrows for them that burn.” (Ps. 7: 13, 14.) Who will be able to escape the hand of the Almighty? Perhaps, you fancy that death is at a great distance from you; that it is far off in the dim future, and hence, you believe that there is plenty of time for doing penance, when you shall have become old and gray. “To-morrow,” says one; “Next year,” says another; “On my death-bed,” says a third, “I will do penance; there is time enough yet; why should we go about brooding over such melancholy things as penance and death, and, thereby, mingle the bitterness of gall with every joy and pleasure? Thou fool, dost thou not know, hast thou not often heard,—yea, and more than once seen with thine own eyes,—that death has chosen for his victims not only the aged and infirm, but those unsuspecting ones who were in the full bloom of youths, and in the prime of manhood? Ah, Christians, you need not go back very far to verify this truth; confining yourselves to this last year,—cast a glance at yonder cemetery wherein the mortal remains of our dead relatives and friends repose until the dawn of the great day of Resurrection. Behold, how many a little mound is raised over the ashes of those cheerful, joyful youths, those beautiful, rosy maidens, those merry, prattling little children, who walked with us only a little while ago through the fair gardens of spring-time and summer! Like those fresh and fragrant flowers, which the traveller by the wayside plucks in their early bloom for his bouquet, death has snatched them from the pleasant fields of life, when they had every prospect and hope of many happy years to come; and has gathered them for the divine Master’s bouquet. Hence, my dear young friends, youth gives you no surety against death; nay, the fairer and more exquisite the flower, the quicker and easier it often falls a prey to the touch of the destroying angel. And will you still persist in saying: “I will do penance and be converted to the Lord at some future time, on my death-bed?” Ah! you have not yet comprehended those words: “*The strongest and most powerful are buried in hell.*” In vain, has God warned you by the sudden and unprovided death of your equals in age: “To-day for them; to-morrow, alas! for me.” See to it, dear Christians, and tell

me whether there can possibly be a more certain danger than by living in impenitence, to expose one's self to eternal perdition.

But, perhaps you have already grown old, my brethren, and death knocks feebly at your door by infirmities and sicknesses, warning you that the last hour of your life is just about to strike. Can it be, that even in the midst of your advancing years and increasing ailments, you cry out, yet, with the deluded worldling of the Gospel: "Soul, thou hast much good laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer"? (Luke 12: 19.) Can it be, that the nearer the end approaches, the less one seems to expect it? That the more agreeable life becomes for many, the more they banish the thought of penance and practical amendment, from their minds? Listen, then, to the solemn words of rebuke and warning which Christ addresses to such souls in the person of the infatuated rich man: "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12: 20.) "Give an account of thy stewardship." (Luke 16: 2.) "How often have you heard related that such a man was slain by the sword; another drowned, another falling from on high, broke his neck; this man died at the table; that other came to his end when he was at play. Some have perished by fire; others, by the sword; some, by pestilence; some, by robbers." (Imit. of Christ, 1. B., 33. chapt.) Yes, how often have you heard, my brethren, that such a one was killed by lightning; another, (perhaps your friend,) was struck by apoplexy; another, your neighbor, your relative, having gone to bed in perfect health, was found dead in the morning. But all these unmistakable lessons make no impression upon us, though we know that the same may happen to us; and though we are all convinced of the truth that, while the hour of death is most uncertain, it is certain to come at the time when we least expect it.

O, I implore you, my beloved brethren, do not delay any longer your repentance and conversion. Nothing is more certain than the danger of perishing eternally, if we do not make good use of the present time. Nothing can guard you against the terrible and irremediable consequences of a death in the state of sin; neither youth nor age, sickness nor health, riches nor poverty, can avert this danger which, like the sword of Damocles, threatens us all. You are so wise and circumspect in everything else, especially when there is question of what is to your temporal advantage. Tell me, what answer would you make, if, at the seed-time, I were to say to you: "My dear friends, quit your work, put your ploughs and spades aside; winter is at hand, your seed may be spoiled, and you will be certain to reap nothing." Would you not reply to me: "My friend, you understand nothing at all about it; if we do not prepare our fields now, we shall be deprived of our harvest; and who will, then, support us and our children?" But who, I ask you, will take care of your soul, if you do not take care of it now? The failure of a crop can be remedied, but the loss

of your one, immortal soul can never be remedied for all eternity. Are you willing and ready to incur this certain perdition by your criminal delay of repentance?

Pray, do not tell me in the words of those presumptuous souls who are daily perishing in their sins: "God is good and merciful; he gives us time for penance." Who denies that God is good and merciful? Yet, although God, this long-suffering God, may give you time for penance, though he be goodness and mercy personified, "*he hath commanded no man to do wickedly; he hath given no man license to sin.*" (Eccles. 15: 21.) He who has promised pardon to penitents, has not promised to-morrow to the sinner. Hence, the Sacred Scripture warns us so often: "Man doth not know his end;" . . . he knows not "at what hour the Son of Man shall come," . . . "he will come at the hour when he is not looked for," . . . "like a thief in the night, the day of the Lord approacheth." Therefore, my brethren, "delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For, his wrath will come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he shall destroy thee." (Eccles. 5: 8, 9.) Never forget that this danger is not only certain, but also very great.

But some one may say: "*We must not take things so much to heart, the danger is not so very pressing after all,—death does not come so quickly.*" But if it *should* come after all, what then? If it should come at that hour you think not, (Luke 12: 40)—what then? What can you reasonably hope for that man who risks all his earthly goods upon one throw of the dice, well knowing that the chances of the next moment may reduce him to utter beggary? Would you not say, dear Christians, that such a man had lost his senses? What, again, do you think of that rich man who would open his house in the night-time, and place all his money and treasures in the open street, under the pretext that they would be better taken care of *there*, than under lock and key in his iron safe? Would you not declare such a man insane? But *you*, my beloved brethren, alas! *you* risk infinitely more than gold and silver and all the treasures of the world; in the same foolish manner, you risk a precious jewel of inestimable value, when you wilfully and presumptuously delay your conversion. Your immortal soul is that priceless jewel, and, once lost, it remains lost for ever; no tears, no prayers, no penances can ever repair the eternal loss of your soul. To whatever side the tree falls, there it shall lie for ever. There is no longer any mercy, any hope, any redemption. And you live as if you had nothing to gain, nothing to lose! How is it possible for a sinner to close his eyes in sleep, since, every time he does so, he is in danger of opening them in hell? Those deluded souls who defer their conversion from day to day, may well be compared to Jonas who slept peacefully in the midst of his enemies, in the midst of the danger of death, just as though he were in the society of his most faithful friends, and far removed from every risk and peril.

Do not say, my brethren, that there are instances of sincere conversion in the evening of life. You mean, perhaps, the thief on the cross. "That one example is given you," as St. Augustine says, "that you may not despair; but only that one, that you may not presume." Nevertheless, you persist in saying: "I may be one of those few who find grace on their death-bed." Do you really think it probable that God will reward your wickedness with a miracle of grace? Would it not be more reasonable for you to say: "It is ten chances to one in my present state of sin that I shall not be of the number of the chosen few?" Tell me, would you throw a precious pearl into the ocean, on the risk that the waves would eventually wash it up again on the shore? Would you set your house on fire, trusting to some wild contingency that the fire would possibly be extinguished without damage to your effects?

Therefore, let all who say: "To-day, or to-morrow, we will do this or that," (and who all the while do not know what to-day or to-morrow will bring forth,)—let all such consider the terrible risks they are running because of their criminal delay of repentance. For what is your life? "It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away." (James 4: 15.) Ah, how many, my dear brethren, have been deceived in this way and who, now, eternally bewail their delay of conversion! Will you, too, increase their unhappy number? Ah no, you will not and cannot desire it, if you consider the detriment as well as the danger which you incur by your continued impenitence. .

II. "Add not sin upon sin; and say not: The mercy of the Lord is great; he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath quickly come from him; and his wrath looketh upon sinners." (Eccles. 5: 5-7.) Those who continually delay their conversion, my brethren, add sin upon sin, and every day, increasing the misery of their souls, they thus fill up the measure of their iniquities. Can there be a greater detriment to their eternal interests than this?

To delay one's repentance and conversion for a long time is to commit an additional sin, which inflicts the greatest ignominy upon the Saviour, mocks his institution of salvation, and insults his blessed Word, which so often and so urgently calls on us to repent. Peruse the whole of the Inspired Text, my dear brethren, and upon every page you will find his merciful invitation to repentance; the same saving call which permeates all the ordinances of the Church. Certain it is, that if you obstinately defer your repentance, you thereby despise all these holy admonitions, and perversely attach your hearts to sin. If God is to be with you and about you—(and what are we, my brethren, without God?)—remove the false gods which you adore;—"a vice in the heart is an idol on the altar." (St. Jerome.) Banish all hatred and enmity, all impurity and debauchery, all anger and contention; since not to repent of our sins nor endeavor to atone for them,

provokes God to still greater anger against us. To sin is human, but to persevere in sin is diabolical. And if you continue in sin, dear brethren, do you comprehend for a moment how grievously you injure your soul? Being weakened by so many mortal wounds, prostrated by so many defeats and miseries, she lies sick unto death, without the power to resist evil or bring forth good fruit for salvation. And if it be true,—(and we cannot doubt it,) that life upon earth is a perpetual warfare, where our foes are unflagging, and where battle follows battle, like the waves of an angry sea,—O, my beloved brethren, where will you find the weapons, where the courage for these never-ceasing combats? Behold, thus it comes to pass that many drink in sin like water, and heap up a burden of iniquity upon their shoulders, a burden, alas! which becomes too heavy for them to support through all their agonizing eternity, and yet they have no choice save to bear it. O my Saviour and my God, it was for those blinded and unhappy Christians that thou hast shed thy precious blood upon the cross;—open, then, the eyes of their spirits that they may see and understand the miserable state of their souls! They are created for thee,—thy blood has flowed for them, they are destined with the rest of thy creatures for the eternal joys of heaven. Open their eyes, that they may see themselves lying before thee like lifeless, decaying corpses; that they may behold and bewail the countless multitude of their daily sins and short-comings. Open their eyes, and place before them the awful vision of that place of fire out of which there is no redemption, that they may see with terror the vast assemblage of their prototypes, the procrastinating sinners who delayed their conversion from year to year, until the day of repentance was past, and the night came “when no man can work.” Open their ears, that they may hear those cries of lamentation and woe, issuing forth from that abode of everlasting horror, and vainly demanding only a few minutes more in which to do penance. Know it, O Christians, that hell is full of such unhappy sinners who meant to have amended their lives, and often spoke of so doing, but always deferred their amendment, and thus, alas! perished eternally. Give but a little time to the reprobate in hell, and they had long since ceased to be its miserable inhabitants; the injury which they had inflicted upon their precious souls would long ere this have been repaired by the speediest and most sincere repentance.

Nor have I fully depicted, poor sinners, all the wretchedness of your state. It may be that your iniquities are multiplied above the hairs of your heads; evil concupiscence is inflamed and seeks nourishment, and the more you feed it, the more it craves the food of sin; your evil habits, in short, have become a second nature. The wrath of God lies heavily upon you; your will is weakened, and your understanding densely clouded. God withdraws his grace from you,—that grace which he has so often offered you; that grace which in this holy Easter-time he offers you once more, and, perhaps, for the last time. The measure of your sins has become

full, so that if the state of your soul were made known to you, you would be tempted to exclaim with the royal prophet: "There is no health in my flesh, because of thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins. For my iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me. My sores are putrefied and corrupted, because of my foolishness. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end. For, my loins are filled with illusions; and there is no health in my flesh." (Ps. 37: 4-8.) Hence, arises the blindness of the understanding, which is so deplorable, inasmuch as it believes that to be good which is evil, and that to be sweet which is sour; the sweet, alas! has become bitter to it. Hence, my brethren, that hardness of heart, which is converted to God neither by adversity nor prosperity, neither by threats nor promises. A good confession in such circumstances is a most difficult task, a most laborious undertaking; and they endeavor to escape it in such a manner as only tends to increase their guilt. Therefore, I cry out to you: Do not go to confession, do not receive the adorable Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, if you are not firmly determined to give up your sinful company and all those occasions and habits of grievous sin; do not approach the sacred tribunal of Penance, if you are not resolved to give up your hatreds and your enmities. You know it yourself, I need not tell you, that you sin mortally thereby; but still greater is your crime, if in that state of sin, you dare to receive the most pure Body of the Lord, trample his precious Blood under your feet, and crucify Jesus anew. But, perhaps, (ah! it is an awful thought!) perhaps, my brethren, by your repeated postponement of a true amendment and conversion you have filled up the measure of your sins, and that the blessed Easter celebration will come no more for *you*! Perhaps, this is the last warning which God gives you in order to draw you to himself; for he desireth not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live; only once more, taste the Lord, and see how sweet his admonitions are.

Hence, dear Christians, delay no longer to be converted to the Lord, lest the measure of your iniquities be filled up, and your sentence of condemnation be issued. Reflect that you have only one soul, and if *that* be lost, all is lost, and lost for ever. Consider the incalculable injury which by your delay you inflict upon that priceless, immortal soul. You destroy her true life before God; and woe to her, if in that state, she be summoned to appear before the judgment-seat of the Lord. Perhaps, my beloved, you will receive that terrible summons even to-day; perhaps, you will not live to see another night; nay, more, perhaps you will perish eternally, if you do not make good use of your present opportunities,—if you still wait, hesitate, and dally with your conversion. As the prophet Jonas once cried out to the Ninivites: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed," (Jonas 3: 4,) so I cry out to you: "Yet forty days, (and I cannot promise you even that much,) and you shall perish in your sins. Yet forty days,

and the time of mercy shall be past; eternity shall have commenced, and your soul shall have been judged for all eternity!" Therefore, my brethren, "return to the Lord, your God, that you may not perish in your iniquities." (Osee 14: 2.) And if you have no compassion for your own souls, have, at least, some pity on your dying Saviour who cries out to each one of us from his cruel bed of the cross: "More than enough have I suffered for you. To die for you is life to me, and to live without you is death to me. Look upon me; my body is covered with wounds; there is no health in my flesh, my head is bowed down, my side opened, my arms are extended to embrace you. I do not ask you why you have forsaken me, I only complain because you do not return to me. O come, return, and everlasting felicity shall be your recompense."—O yes, O Jesus, we return to thee, we come to thee, all, without exception. And though we have hitherto hesitated, and delayed our conversion, to-day shall witness the return of the prodigal and his true conversion to thee. Give us thy grace that we may bring forth worthy fruits of penance; "turn away thy face from our sins," (Ps. 50: 11,). "Open to us the gates of justice, and we will go into them, and give praise to thy name for all eternity." (Ps. 117: 19.) Amen.

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## SIXTH FRIDAY IN LENT.

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HOW GLAD YOU WILL BE!*“My soul shall rejoice.” Ps. 34: 9.*

A return to God, my beloved brethren, is absolutely necessary, if the sinner desires to escape eternal damnation. Either penance or eternal perdition. There is no middle way. “Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13: 3.) “Do penance; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3: 2.) This return to God, however, is no child’s play, but requires a determined will and many sacrifices. The longer conversion is deferred, the greater become the obstacles, the more rare is repentance; and finally, all is irretrievably lost. Therefore, in my last discourse I said: “Delay not.” O, that you may attend to this call, dear Christians, and without delay, arise from the pit into which you have fallen! Then, you will be exceedingly glad, you will rejoice like to a person rescued from shipwreck, rejoice like to a man who is pulled safely out of a burning mine. And this shall be the subject of our last Lenten meditation. How glad you will be, how your soul will rejoice

- I. *In every hour of life-long repentance, and*
- II. *Especially in your last hour.*

I. “There is no health in my flesh, there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins.” (Ps. 37: 4.) “Sleep is gone from my eyes, and I am fallen away; and my heart is cast down for anxiety.” (1. Mach. 6: 10.) Thus sighs the sinner, finding voice in the words of the great penitents of the Old Law. But how different are his emotions the moment he returns to God! His conversion brings into his heart .

1. *Sweet consolation, because*

a) *His sin is blotted out.* “The Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickedness.” (Numb. 14: 18.) “If my people being converted, do penance for their most wicked ways, then, I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins.” (2. Paralip. 7: 14.) “I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist.” (Is. 44: 22.) “God is patient with sinners till they are converted, and this being done, he forgets the past.” (St. Aug.) What blessed consolation for the sincere penitent! The guilt is blotted out. Though I have committed many and

great crimes,—as soon as I truly repent of them, the guilt is blotted out. Though I have perpetrated a thousand sacrileges and outrages richly deserving of hell fire,—as soon as I turn to my heavenly Father, crying *Peccavi!* with sentiments of real and profound contrition, the guilt is blotted out. How you must rejoice, my dear brethren, at such a thought!

b) *You are reconciled to your God.* “Because they are humbled,” says that merciful God, “I will not destroy them; and I will give them a little help; and my wrath shall not fall upon them,” (2. Paralip. 12: 7.) “If that nation against which I have spoken,” says he again, “shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them.” (Jer. 18: 8.) “How great is the mercy of the Lord,” cries out the Wise Man in amazement: “and his forgiveness of them that turn to him.” (Eccles. 17: 28.) And, lo! in the parable of the prodigal son we read with grateful tears, dear Christians: “The father was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him.” (Luke 15: 20.) What a comfort for the converted sinner! He can say: “My God is reconciled to me; I can look up to him once more with confidence, and need not fear the arrows of his anger.” But your return to God produces still another fruit. It brings a

2. *Sure hope of life.* By his return to God, the sinner becomes

a) *A child of God.* Grace, God’s most beautiful and highest gift to man, is lost by sin. “If any one saith, that a man, once justified, can sin no more, or lose grace, let him be anathema,” declares the solemn Council of Trent. (Concil. Trid., sess. 6, can. 23.) In the fifteenth chapter of the same session it is taught that *by every mortal sin, grace is lost.* To the repentant sinner, God gives again the precious treasure of his divine grace. Through a mystery which he alone can accomplish, he makes him the object of his complacency, and adorns him with the lost ornaments of the faithful son and heir. “Bring forth quickly the first robe and put it on him,” said the father of the Prodigal, “and put a ring on his hand.” “Born again,” said our Lord to Nicodemus. (John 3: 3.) And “Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us,” bursts forth the Apostle of love in admiration, “that we should be named and should be the sons of God.” (1. John 3: 1.) Thus man is made a child of God, and for that very reason,

b) *An heir of heaven.* “And if sons, heirs also, heirs, indeed, of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” as St. Paul declares in his Epistle to the Romans. (8: 17.) The great inheritance which God has prepared for the children of grace, and of which Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, has already taken possession, is heaven. “God hath appointed us to the purchasing of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1. Thess. 5: 9,) “unto an inheritance

incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not, reserved in heaven for you." (1. Pet. 1: 4.) How rejoiced, therefore, will you be, my beloved brethren, in every hour of your repentant life! How glad will you be when you reflect that your guilt, (no matter how great,) is blotted out, and that you are sweetly reconciled with your offended God! How glad, when you reflect that you are a child of that great and good God, and an heir of heaven, a co-heir, in short, with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Indeed, whatever the world may present you as grand and delightful, cannot possibly bring you such consolation and comfort as these considerations afford. You should thank God every day for your conversion, my dear brethren, and praise his mercies. "My soul shall rejoice," exults the royal penitent of old. . . . (Ps. 34: 9,) "The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever." (Ps. 88: 2.)

II. How glad you will be, how much you will rejoice in your last hour! For

1. *All things are set in order.* The last hour, no doubt, is an hour rich in tears. We have numberless examples of this before our eyes. But particularly bitter is this hour to the children of sin. Death knocks at the door in the midst of their unjust money-getting, of their impure and sensual diversions, and, alas! what fear and anguish and lamentation does not the sound of that skeleton hand evoke! "They shall be troubled with terrible fear," says the Inspired Text, "and shall be amazed at the suddenness." (Wisd. 5: 2.) How much, on the other hand, will you rejoice, O sinner! if now you arise from the abyss of sin and embrace a life of penance; for at the hour of death you will find all things set in order

a) *Before God.* You have confessed and bewailed your sins in good season, and the Lord has pardoned them. Every thing is now in order. What a consolation there is for the dying person in this pleasing thought: I go, indeed, to a God, "who is just in all his ways," (Ps. 144: 7,) "who rendereth to every one according to his works," (Matt. 6: 27,) but all my house is set in order. I go to a God, whom I have, indeed, offended by my sins, but with whom I have reconciled myself by repentance in time. Blessed be his mercy! my house is set in order,

b) *Before the world.* By your prompt conversion, long before the hour of death, you have also reconciled yourself with the world, and the world, too, has forgiven you. How consoling for the dying man is the thought: I am about to depart from a world, wherein I have repaired whatever damage or injury I have caused by my sins. I have restored the injured reputation of my neighbor, I have made restitution of the ill-gotten goods I once wrongfully acquired, I have blotted out, thank God!

all the scandals I have given. My house is set in order. How rejoiced is the steward who has his books and cash in order, when he is called upon by his master to render an account. No less will *you* be rejoiced, my dear Christians, when at the approach of death you find that all your spiritual affairs are set in order. Then

2. *The departure is easy.* You will leave the world

a) *With a joyous confidence in God.* "As I live, saith the Lord God," (by the mouth of his prophet,) "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live." (Ezech. 33: 11.) "The Son of man," said the Eternal Truth himself, "is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19: 10.) For this reason, my brethren, the converted penitent departs this life with confidence in God who has forgiven his sins, and with confidence in the Redeemer whose blood has cleansed his soul from every stain. You will leave this world, dear Christians,

b) *With the joyous assurance of salvation.* It is true a man who has once fallen into grievous sin, can lay no just claim to heaven,—only "the innocent in hand, the clean of heart" can aspire to ascend the mountain of the Lord. And no man, my brethren, knows whether he be worthy of love or hatred. But on account of God's mercy and his promises to forgive the penitent, and reinstate him in all his rights,—the converted sinner may, nevertheless, expect eternal salvation with confidence.

How rejoiced will you be in the last hour, if you now return and do penance; for, then, your house will be set in order and it will be easy for you to die. In that last hour, you will look back with confidence upon the past, and rejoice that you, then, sincerely confessed your sins, abandoned the way of iniquity, and made your peace with God and the world, "before your feet stumbled upon the dark mountain." But you will also look forward with confidence into the future, dear Christians,—look forward across the precipice of the grave into eternity, where the crown of glory awaits you. With the Apostle of the Gentiles, you will joyfully exclaim: "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ." (Phil. 1: 25.) A good death will be yours, my brethren, if you die now to sin that you may live to justice. This death must precede and anticipate the inevitable death of the body, since the Psalmist has expressly declared: "Blessed are the *dead* who die in the Lord. Die to yourself and your sins, therefore, dear Christians, while the uncertain span of this life remains to you, and thus you will happily prepare yourself in time for that blessed life which lasts for all eternity. Amen.

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## PALM SUNDAY.

## THE PROPER RECEPTION OF THE HOLY COMMUNION.

*“Behold thy king cometh to thee, meek.” Matt. 21: 5.*

David, (that man according to the heart of the Lord,) wished to build a temple to the most high God which would be worthy of him. Accordingly, he gathered together an indescribably large amount of gold and silver, copper, iron, marble, precious stones, and other materials necessary for the construction of such a temple. But he was not satisfied with this; he called in conclave the princes and elders of the people, and showed them the whole store of treasures which he had collected; and commanded them to tell the multitude what they had seen, and thereby encourage them to contribute, (each according to his will and ability,) towards the erection of God's temple. “For,” said the king, “we are about to do a great and important thing; it is not *for man*, but *for God*, that a dwelling is to be prepared.” The people hearing this, gave 15,000 talents of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 pounds of brass and 100,000 pounds of iron; and some of their number contributed precious stones towards the erection and adornment of the temple. The reflection, full of living faith, that a dwelling was to be prepared not for man, but for God, animated both king and people, to make the sacrifice of all their treasures, in order to erect and adorn that abode of the Most High in the most costly and becoming manner.

What David said of the Temple of Jerusalem,—with far more right can we say of our hearts, dear brethren, before the reception of the holy Communion, viz: that a dwelling is to be prepared for God. The ark was placed in that olden Temple in which the tables of the Law and other sacred things were deposited. But who comes to us in holy Communion? Faith tells us that Jesus Christ comes to us with his Body and Soul, Flesh and Blood, with his Humanity and Divinity. And to whom does he come? Who are we, my brethren? Are we worthy to receive him into our hearts? Can we make ready for him a worthy habitation? Can we sufficiently prepare ourselves for his reception in Communion?

Solomon built the Temple, after David, his father, had spent years in collecting an abundance of everything necessary to erect it in the greatest splendor and magnificence. It took seven years to build it, although it is recorded, that there were no less than 3,600 architects and superintendents of the work.

How much time do *you* spend, dear Christians, in preparing yourselves for Communion? Perhaps not half an hour; perhaps, not even a quarter of an hour. Before Communion, we ought to reflect on these two questions: *Who comes to us?* and: *To whom does Jesus come?* We should remember in the bitterness of our souls, that we have been once, (and, it may be, only a short time since), great sinners; we should not forget, that we are sinners yet, weak, frail, sinful creatures, full of infirmities and imperfections, impatient in sufferings and afflictions, irritable and uncharitable towards our neighbor, slothful in doing good, and lukewarm in performing the duties of our state of life. In a word, we ought to spend more time in examining ourselves before holy Communion, that we may know our unworthiness; for the better we know this, the better prepared we will be to go to the table of the Lord; the more we distrust ourselves, the more we shall confide and trust in our loving God and Saviour. If we strike our breasts with heartfelt sorrow and contrition for our sins, and say: "Lord, I am not worthy, that thou shouldst enter under my roof," we shall be able to say with greater, stronger confidence, "Lord! speak but the word, and my soul shall be healed!" St. Paul says, let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of this chalice. By this proving of one's self we understand the cleansing and purifying of our conscience from all sin. We read in the book of Exodus: "The Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, and he saw the bush was on fire and was not consumed. And Moses said: I will go and will see the sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he went forward to see, he called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said: Moses, Moses. And he answered: Here I am. And he said, *Come not nigh hither*; put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy."—This is an emblem of the Blessed Eucharist, for as God hid himself in the bush, so Jesus Christ hides himself under the appearances of bread and wine. If a Christian dare to go to this heavenly banquet with a conscience defiled by sin, let him heed the warning: "*Come not nigh hither*," for he who is hidden under the species of bread is holy. "*Come not nigh hither*," ye *proud and haughty ones*, for here is present the most humble Jesus, who was born in a stable, and crucified between two malefactors. "*Come not nigh hither*," ye *passionate, vindictive, avaricious, and envious sinners*, for here is present the meekest of Saviours who, when he was reviled, reviled not; who did good to all, and even prayed for his murderers. "*Come not nigh hither*," ye *unchaste*, for here is present Jesus, the lover of purity, who selected the purest of creatures for his mother, and who chose to be born of a virgin, in order to manifest his love for purity, and to show how pure our souls should be when we receive him in holy Communion. "*Come not nigh hither*," ye *drunkards and gluttons*, for here is present the mortified Jesus, who fasted forty days and forty nights; and who, on the cross, quenched his thirst with vinegar and gall.

We would consider that man a sacrilegious wretch who would have the temerity to defile an image of Christ; what, then, my brethren, shall we think of him who dares to receive his Saviour and his God into a heart defiled by sin? And, yet, there are Christians who, at Easter-time, receive Communion in this state. They go to Communion after a confession made without true contrition, without a firm purpose to sin no more, without candor and sincerity; they receive Communion without the resolution to quit their evil habits, to avoid the occasions of sin, to restore ill-gotten goods,—in short, without the will to amend their lives. All these receive Communion unworthily, and render themselves guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord, and eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the Body of the Lord. Ponder well this truth, and avoid nothing more carefully than an unworthy Communion. Be solicitous, above all, to make a good confession, that with a pure heart you may receive the God of all purity.

Our hearts must not only be free from sin, but also adorned with all Christian virtues. What do you do when you expect a noble guest to spend only one day with you? You prepare the best room for him; you have it swept, dusted, garnished with mirrors and pictures, and adorned with your best furniture. Can a greater guest come to you than Jesus Christ? Before you receive him, therefore, dear Christians, make acts of faith, hope, and charity; humble yourselves profoundly, and acknowledge with the centurion in the Gospel: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof;” but, at the same time, have courage and confidence, because he invites particularly those who are troubled and heavily laden. Have an ardent desire to be united with him, that he may sanctify, comfort, and strengthen you. “I am the living Bread that came down from heaven; he that eats of this Bread remains in me and I in him; he shall live for ever.” If, with such a preparation, you go to Communion, you may be sure, that Jesus will take up his abode in your hearts, and shower his choicest blessings upon you.

After having received Communion, you are living tabernacles of God. Jesus Christ, who is really present here in the tabernacle, will dwell then in your heart. If we must adore Jesus Christ in the tabernacle, what else must you do, but adore him in your own heart when he has condescended to make it his abode. Ah, you would be a Christian of little or no faith, if immediately after Communion, you yield to distractions; you would be of the number of those of whom St. Paul says, that they discern not the body of the Lord, (from common food). Try, then, my dear brethren, to be recollected after Communion; think of Jesus alone who in his infinite love and condescension has vouchsafed with all the treasures of his humanity and divinity, to enter into your hearts; and adore him with the most profound veneration, as the Angels and Saints adore him in heaven.

At the same time, return thanks to God for this great grace. If some

one would make you a present of a thousand dollars, or of an estate, or a kingdom, you could scarcely find words enough to express your gratitude. But when you receive Communion, Jesus gives you more than a great sum of money or an estate, more than all the kingdoms of the world, for he, the Creator of heaven and earth, gives himself to you to be your food, your guest. Hence, St. Augustine says: "God is infinitely powerful, and, yet, he could do no greater work than this; infinitely wise, and yet he knew not how to manifest his wisdom more strikingly;—he is infinitely rich and liberal, and yet he had no more magnificent gift to give us than that which he has given us in the Blessed Eucharist. In this adorable Sacrament, Jesus, as it were, has exhausted the riches of his power, wisdom and liberality, for he has given us everything that he is and has,—himself. And should we not thank him? Yea, my dear brethren, with our whole hearts.

Resolve to give yourselves to Jesus with an undivided love, since he has given himself to you without reserve. Promise to that Saviour, who is your Guest, that you will never again admit into your heart, anything displeasing to him and that you will serve him faithfully all the days of your life. You are, perhaps, addicted to a fault, which you frequently commit; it is your predominant passion; make a special resolution, to guard against it with greater care until your next Communion. Such resolutions form a principal part of the thanksgiving after Communion, and Jesus is well pleased with them if they are made with sincerity of heart, because then he sees, that you are really resolved to dedicate yourselves to his service.

But since, of yourselves, dear Christians, you cannot put these good resolutions into practice, beg our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist to assist you by his holy grace. No time is more favorable to obtain from your Saviour every grace you stand in need of, than that immediately after Communion. He is actually present in your heart; you have him, as it were, in your power, and you can say with Jacob: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Hence, St. Theresa says: "After Communion, Jesus Christ is in our hearts as upon the throne of mercy, in order to give us all graces." He cries out to us: "What wilt thou, that I should do unto thee?" Therefore, we must not allow so favorable an opportunity of enriching ourselves to pass unimproved. Ask, then, my dear brethren, ask Jesus whom you bear in your heart, for everthing you need, especially for the grace to keep the promises you have made, and for the inestimable gift of final perseverance.

But the best thanksgiving of all is to lead a truly pious and penitential life. Do not, I beseech you, imitate those Christians who, after Communion, are as cold and indevout as before. How much have such communicants to fear that they approach the table of the Lord unworthily and, instead of salvation, receive their damnation! Therefore, my brethren, like good Christians, prepare yourselves with fervor for holy Communion;

and after Communion, perform your thanksgiving with all possible devotion. Thus, you will always communicate worthily, and the words of Christ, dear brethren, will be happily verified in you: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath life everlasting." Amen.

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## PALM SUNDAY.

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### ON THE PROPER PREPARATION FOR THE PASCHAL COMMUNION.

*"Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold, thy king cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke."* Matt. 21: 5.

On this beautiful day when the Church celebrates the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as the King of peace, amid the joyous shouts of the people, no more fitting subject can be presented to your kind attention, my beloved brethren, than the one contained in the words of my text: "Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold, thy King cometh to thee, meek." The solemn blessing and distribution of the palms, and the reading of the Passion of our Lord, make the office of the morning already longer than usual, and we cannot, therefore, suppose that you will expect a very long instruction. Still, we would not comply with the wishes of our holy mother, the Church, if we did not say, at least, a few words to you on the Gospel from which I have taken my text. The instructions contained therein are so particularly suitable to this week, called Holy Week, during which most of you, I trust, will approach to your Easter Communion, that I shall, without further introduction, invite you to follow me in these considerations on that sublime subject.

I. *"Tell ye the daughter of Sion."* "The priests, the ministers of God, (as the heralds of the coming of the King of peace, of glory, and of justice,) are thus told to announce his approach to the daughter of Jerusalem. Know, my dear Christians, that each one of your souls is that daughter of Jerusalem especially favored and loved by God, to whom he comes when, in the Holy Communion, you receive his Body and Blood, his soul and divinity. I am here, then, to-day, to announce to you, or rather to remind you, that your king will come to you, first of all "a king of peace" as foretold by Isaías and Zachary. Even as he entered into the holy city, seated upon an animal, perhaps the least amongst the beasts of burden, so he will enter into your soul in your Paschal Communion, under appearances most

ordinary, veiled and hidden, his might and power, (as it were), concealed by the humble species of bread. There is nothing formidable in his exterior,—nothing in appearance by which the majesty and greatness of the King of kings can be discerned. In truth, he comes, as foretold by the prophet Zachary: “The Meek, Just, and Saviour.” (Zach. 9: 9.) He will come, and he will not delay. With you, my dear Christians, within your souls, he will take up his abode, the humble “Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world,” yet, withal, the King of glory whom the Angels adore, the joy and happiness of the celestial inhabitants, before whom the very pillars of heaven tremble. You know this, you believe it, though your eyes see him not;—though your senses say: “It is but bread,” your faith exclaims: “It is my God, the King of kings, the Lord of the Universe, the Sovereign Master of all, whom I behold concealed under the outward form of bread.” He has deigned to use this form, in order to encourage you to come to him. For as bread is the daily nourishment of man, by which he is strengthened and enabled to perform his ordinary duties, so this Bread of Angels becomes the food of the soul, by which it is strengthened and enabled to perform all its Christian duties. “With me,” so he speaks to you from the depths of this Adorable Sacrament: “with me are riches and glory, glorious riches and justice . . . that I may enrich them that love me, and may fill their treasures.” (Prov. 8: 18, 21.)

What happiness, what joy should animate you, my dear brethren, at the thought that you will receive your God, your Saviour! To all alike this blessing is offered; young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all of us are united to our blessed Lord during the Paschal time; and I trust, most of you will, during this week, rejoice in the possession of your God. Begin, then, this day, this very moment, to prepare yourselves for that honor and happiness, by a lively faith in the real presence of our Lord in the holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the first requisite for a worthy Communion; for this unshaken faith will teach you that before you can approach Jesus and receive him into your hearts, you must loose your souls from all the fetters of sin.

II. The great St. Ambrose, doctor of the Church, speaking of the Gospel of this day, says that our souls are like the animal which the Apostles were told to loose and bring to their Master. The ministers of the Gospel, the priests of the Church, are, indeed, instructed at all times to loose the souls of unfortunate sinners held in bondage by Satan, but more particularly are they told to do so during this holy season of mercy. Jesus Christ wishes every one to be brought to him by being reconciled with God; and that consummation happily effected, he wishes, as it were, to enter the Jerusalem of that purified soul, and take entire possession of it. Faith teaches us that a soul in mortal sin is an abomination in the eyes of God; that the fetters which bind it fast to the slavery of the devil,

can be loosened only by the priest in the holy Sacrament of Penance; and, therefore, that all those who feel themselves conscious of great guilt must first approach that holy tribunal to be absolved. You have been frequently admonished during the time of Lent to prepare yourselves for the reception of the Sacraments at Easter,—to give up whatever bad or sinful habits you may have contracted, to be resolved to abandon sin and the occasions of sin, with the firm determination to begin a new life for the future. These, as you know, are essential conditions for that holy absolution, without which the priest would, in vain, attempt to free the soul from the bondage of sin. I trust, my beloved brethren, that you have carefully complied with these conditions. But should there be any one here present whose conscience is as yet burdened, or who has not yet bid farewell to the passions and inordinate affections that keep him enslaved, let him delay no longer, remembering that the God whom he wishes to receive in the Holy Communion, though merciful and good, is also just, and that he will pour out his wrath upon those who receive him without due and proper preparation. “The Meek, *Just*, and Saviour,” says the prophet Zachary. With St. Ambrose, therefore, I repeat to you: “Sound your hearts, examine yourselves earnestly; go with lively faith to the priest, ask to be absolved, and with joy and happiness in your souls, imitate those people of Jerusalem who, on this day, accompanied Jesus as their king, crying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest’!”

But, what do I see, my brethren, amid the universal joy, amid these lively manifestations of love and affection? Jesus weeps. “Seeing the city,” so says the Evangelist, “he wept over it.” What, O my Lord, can be the reason of thy grief,—what the cause of thy sad emotion and tears? Alas! my dear Christians, Jesus is the omniscient God, and he knew that many of the people of that city, so favored by heaven, were not sincere in their tributes of love and praise. Seeing their inmost hearts, he knew that jealousy and envy would lead them in a few brief days to the horrible crime of deicide. Others he knew, though perhaps sincere at the moment, would soon be carried away by the fierce and malicious tumult of the populace, and forgetful of their recent cries: “Hosanna to the Son of David,” would clamor with the rest of his enemies: “Crucify him! Crucify him!” This was the cause of his sadness and tears. And may we not, my brethren, believe that, (God as he is,) he beheld that hour, in the mirror of the future, the sacrileges of so many false Christians who, with outward tokens of sincerity and repentance, but with interior attachments to their criminal passions, would have the audacious presumption to receive him unworthily in Holy Communion. He knew how the daughters of Sion, the favored children of the Church, after the most solemn protestations of love and affection for him, would again forsake him, and clamor as the Jews did, crying: “‘Away with him,—give us Barabbas.’ Away with Jesus, give us

the indulgence of our criminal lusts, give us copious draughts of our poisonous drink, give us our dishonest gains, our filthy lucre, our days and nights of sinful neglect!" I hope and trust that no one here present, my brethren, will be so base as to approach the holy Table like a hypocrite, pretending by a pious exterior to be a friend of Jesus, but inwardly desiring the destruction of his kingdom; serving not God, but Satan or his evil passions. No, no, you are resolved, one and all, with a firm and sincere purpose to choose Jesus for your king, and with the required dispositions, to come to the priest of God to be freed from the thralldom and dominion of the Arch-Enemy. In the past, perhaps, you have made similar protestations, sincere enough at the time, but followed by the hour of temptation in which you cowardly gave way to the suggestions of the evil one;—now, at last, you are determined, with the help of God, to relapse no more, but to be faithful in the combat which undoubtedly awaits you.

Such being your dispositions, come with confidence to the holy tribunal, and you will hear with joy from the lips of the ambassador of God, the consoling words: "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." Then, being cleansed from sin, you will prepare yourself to receive the sacred Body and Blood of your Saviour, and to the end that you may approach him with sentiments of true piety and devotion, I shall now further explain to you, my brethren, the words of to-day's Gospel.

III. Our dear Lord had been in Jerusalem more than once before the occasion of his triumph, as we read in the Sacred Text. He had gone there with Mary, his Mother, and with Joseph, his Foster-father, in order to comply with the law of Moses; he had entered the temple, and by his conduct proved that he was God; he had driven out of that sacred place the mercenary wretches who failed to show it the proper respect. But to-day, and to-day only, he enters Jerusalem as a king. The people receive him as such, spreading their garments before him, and carrying palm-branches in their hands. As a king, also, he wishes to enter into our hearts, dear Christians, in the Holy Communion. As a king, he wishes to rule and govern our interior and our exterior,—in short, our entire being. To him, therefore, as our Sovereign monarch, we must offer the inclinations and desires of our hearts, the powers and faculties of our souls, all the senses of our bodies. By right they belong to him, and by our own free will choosing him as our king, we must bring him the sacrifice of our understanding, our memory, and our will,—our thoughts, desires, and actions. Not, indeed, for an hour or a day, but for life.

With these sentiments, my brethren, approach the holy table, the Banquet of the elect. And, O, when the priest comes and places the consecrated species on your tongue,—when Jesus will be, as it were, enclosed within your mouth, when he will descend into your heart and rest within your bosom,—your soul becoming the living temple and tabernacle of

your Saviour,—cry out to him with all the fervor and love of your being: “I have found him whom my soul loveth, and I will not let him go.” (Cant. 3: 4.) The Angels hover around you in that hallowed moment; with profound veneration they adore their God whom you have received; and you, with sentiments of humility and loyal love, you must unite with them, beloved Christians, in praising and glorifying your King, the King of Kings, the Lord and Master of your heart. You must invite all the powers of your soul to remain prostrate at his feet, and there ask of him all the graces, favors, and blessings that may be needful for you to glorify God aright, and through Jesus Christ to secure to yourselves the salvation of your souls. You must again, with lively faith, with unwavering confidence and ardent love, offer your whole self to him, and beg him never to permit you to be separated from him any more. Ask not only for pardon for past infidelities, but for strength against the temptations which you know will assail you in the future. “Forgive us our trespasses . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Spending at least fifteen minutes in these pious thoughts and holy aspirations, you will experience the effect of Christ’s presence in your soul;—you will wish to become more and more united with him, and the pleasures of the world, especially such as might endanger your salvation, will no more have any attraction for you.

May our dear Lord, through the intercession of his Immaculate Mother, grant us all, my dear brethren, to receive the Holy Communion with these devout dispositions which faith requires of us! Let us fervently strive to animate ourselves with the sentiments which I have suggested, and we will, then, clearly manifest by our exterior, our firm belief that Jesus Christ is present within our hearts in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar. And, receiving him thus within us, with sincere sorrow for our past sins by which we have so basely offended him, we will be resolved, by the assistance of his grace, rather to suffer death itself, than again be separated from him. That Jesus, “the Meek, Just, and Saviour,” the Son of David to whom the people of Jerusalem, on this day, cried *Hosanna*,—that he, the Mighty One, entering our hearts in the Paschal Communion, may animate us with these holy desires, and strengthen us in our present good resolutions, is my earnest prayer for all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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Rev. L. BAX.

## GOOD FRIDAY.

## THE DERELICTION OF JESUS UPON THE CROSS.

*“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Matt. 27: 46.*

The bitter Passion and death of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, ought to be, especially in this week, the chief subject of our meditation. If we review, with some attention, the life and Passion of our Blessed Lord from his birth to his burial, we will come, my brethren, to the sad conclusion that *all his sufferings have their ground and cause in the malice, or, at least, in the imperfection of men.* The malice of men assigned to the Son of God a stable for his birth-place; the malice of men drove him from his home into a foreign country; the malice of men pursued him in all his ways from youth to manhood; that same malice stretched forth and strengthened the hand of his enemies in order to apprehend, to strike, and to crucify him; and finally, that cruel malice tortured him, the innocent Lamb of God, even to the close of his bitter agony upon the cross.—*Only one suffering was inflicted upon him, (without the intervention of men), immediately by God.* And what is that exceptional suffering? It is that which on the cross forced from his Sacred Heart the painful complaint embodied in my text: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” It is his being abandoned by God. And it is just this suffering which is least known to Christians, and, consequently, least esteemed by them: and no wonder; for it is really a mystery of which we would have no knowledge, whatsoever, if it had not pleased the Lord to raise the curtain, (as it were), on the cross and, granting us a glimpse of his interior, to reveal to us what occurred in that sanctuary of his soul during the time of his intense physical sufferings. But just because it is so little known, and so little regarded, when truly, my brethren, it is the most significant of all the torments of Jesus, I shall avail myself of this hour of devotion and spiritual recollection, in order to make with you a short meditation upon this touching mystery. I repeat, therefore: The abandonment of Jesus by God on the cross is the most significant of all his sufferings since it was

- I. The most painful;*
- II. The longest endured; and*
- III. The strongest proof of the love of Jesus for his Eternal Father.*

I. In order, dear Christians, to get a clear idea or representation, (although it be, after all, but a feeble one), of the abandonment experienced

by our Blessed Redeemer on the Cross, we must, first of all, consider that Jesus Christ was *both God and man*. We, my brethren, have only *one soul* in our body; Christ possessed in his body, not only like us, a human soul, but beside the human soul, the divine nature, which dwelt in him; so that he united in himself two natures, the human and the divine.

*What took place at the moment when God forsook Jesus?* The divine nature in Jesus Christ withdrew itself from the human soul in a manner inexplicable to us; it no longer operated upon it. His divine nature did not separate itself from the body and the soul, but it no longer administered any light or consolation to the human soul, so that it was as if the divinity had really and completely departed. *And what was the result of this apparent separation?* The result was that the human soul in Jesus Christ felt, in that hour of supreme anguish, as if she were really alone, entirely separated from and forsaken by God; she seemed to be in the condition of one who had drawn down upon herself the displeasure and indignation of God and the wrath of heaven. She was seized with the tormenting thought that the face of the all-holy God was averted, and would remain eternally averted from her; that his heart was closed against her, and would remain closed against her for ever.

Now you will begin to realize, dear brethren, *that this suffering was the most painful of all the sufferings of our crucified Redeemer*. Not to mention that it was a suffering of the soul, (a purely spiritual pain); and that the sufferings of the soul, (spiritual, interior torments,) cause more vehement anguish than is inflicted by mere corporal sufferings, —I say, there can be nothing more terrible than the thought of being separated from God, the highest Good. This thought is something inexpressibly awful, even for a dying sinner who during his whole life cared nothing for God, despised and blasphemed him, wallowing for years in the mire of iniquity. How much more terrible, then, is this thought in every situation of life for a person who has always loved God with all the affection of his soul, and served him with all the sincerity of his heart; who knows and desires to know no other happiness, no other joy or pleasure, than to be eternally united with the Supreme Good? In order to bring only one example of this sort before you, my brethren, permit me to remind you of the violent temptation of St. Francis of Sales, who at one period of his innocent and holy youth, was disquieted by the thought that he was forsaken and rejected by God. O, how this poor soul, inflamed with the love of God, bewailed his distress and dereliction both day and night. Almost unceasingly, the bitterest tears flowed from his pure young eyes; the anguish of his soul was so terrible, that even the most painful death would have been welcome to him, in order to escape that cruel pain. How terrible, then, must it have been for Jesus to feel himself all at once forsaken by his Eternal Father; for Jesus Christ, who was always united with God, who always loved God with the most perfect love; who never had or knew any

other will but God's will, who for the love of God, took upon himself all the tribulations of life—what words can describe the depths and intensity of *his* dereliction? As far as heaven is above the earth, so far his agony surpasses that of all his suffering creatures.

If the Saints sometimes experience a similar abandonment, although only in miniature, it appears to them more painful than the torments of hell itself. And yet, the Saints have the consoling consciousness that their being forsaken by God is only a trial of their virtue; that it serves to cleanse them from their sins and imperfections, and to qualify them more rapidly for heaven; to increase their merits in time and their reward in eternity. But even this consolation was wanting to our divine Saviour. And why? Because he had taken upon himself all the sins of the world, and had become the scape-goat of our iniquities. He saw in spirit all the sins, vices, crimes, and abominations which from the fall of the first man defiled the human race, and will defile it until the hour of the last judgment. And at the sight of these many and grievous crimes, he felt as if he, alone, had committed them, and was obliged to atone for them; unspeakable was his abhorrence of the turpitude of sin, unspeakable was his grief on account of the dishonor of God. In his woe and consternation, he felt as if the sins of the world formed an insurmountable barrier between himself and God; he felt now, (because he felt as mere man), as if he never could make sufficient reparation, or perfect satisfaction to the divine justice for the assumed guilt of sin; and for this reason, it seemed to him in that hour of tremendous agony, as if he were rejected by God. St. Paul plainly teaches this in his Epistle to the Galatians, when he says: "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, BEING MADE A CURSE FOR US; for it is written: CURSED IS EVERY ONE THAT HANGETH ON A TREE.*" (Galat. 3: 13.) "*His body shall not remain on the tree, but shall be buried the same day; for he is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree.*" (Deut. 21: 23.) Crushing, as it did, the Sacred Heart of our Blessed Lord with all its heavy weight,—in this curse chiefly consisted the torment and the horror of his being forsaken by God. Truly, we may boldly assert that though the other sufferings of his Passion,—for instance, his anguish on account of the blindness and malice of the Jews, on account of the weakness and fall of some of his disciples; the torments of his scourging, his crowning with thorns, his crucifixion,—were great and bitter, yet, in comparison with the torture of his dereliction, they were only as a refreshing dew. The abandonment of Jesus by his Eternal Father is in reality *a nameless suffering*, nameless in the full sense of the word; there is no name, there are no words, neither in the language of men, nor in the language of the Angels, sufficient to express its depths, its extent, its intensity.

II. But what increased and aggravated the pain of the abandonment of Jesus by God in an incredible manner, was *its long duration*, a circumstance

which must not be overlooked and disregarded, if we do not wish to form an erroneous conception of this mystery.

1. This extraordinary pain did not begin only at the moment when Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—for in that case, he would have said: *Why dost thou forsake me?* Neither did it take its inception when he was nailed to the cross, and elevated upon it on Mount Calvary. This pain, on the contrary, was *the first* which came upon him after the Last Supper, and the *last* which departed from him on the hard bed of the cross. That his abandonment by God took its inception on Mount Olivet, Jesus Christ, himself, gives us to understand both by word and action. Contemplate him only for a moment, my dear brethren, in his agony in the Garden. In what a pitiable state does he not appear! Enormous mountains of sin were crushing him with their abominable weight; he sighs, he sobs and groans; trembling and growing pale, he wrings his hands, and sinks prostrate on the earth. There he lies upon his face as if annihilated;—dissolved in the agony of his soul, he prays,—yes, prays for hours, fervently imploring the divine mercy and compassion; prays with such a fire of desire that the very stones on which he lay, (more tender than the obdurate hearts of sinners), might have been moved to love and pity for him.

*And why all this intense suffering?* Perhaps, out of fear of the corporal pains which were awaiting him during that night and the following day? That is impossible. We must not represent our Blessed Lord to ourselves as less courageous, less noble-hearted, than the holy martyrs. But no martyr, I believe, has ever bewailed his anticipated sufferings as Jesus did in the Garden of Olives. With him, therefore, it must have been another, a higher, *the* highest suffering in fact, that can be imagined, which terrified him on that occasion in such an extraordinary manner;—it must have been the pain of his abandonment by God. When the presence of God and the consolation of God are sensible, my brethren, the soul of the saint knows nothing of pusillanimity or hesitation. Remember St. Francis Xavier. Before his departure to Asia, he beheld in a vision all the hardships, tribulations, and sufferings which he was to undergo in his missionary enterprise. But with holy courage and enthusiasm, he cried out: "More yet, O God, more yet!" Should our Blessed Lord be surpassed by a saint in fortitude? What a senseless blasphemy! Therefore, because in the Garden of Olives he felt himself already forsaken by his God, he was plunged into that boundless abyss of sadness in which he said to his disciples: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death." (Matt. 26: 38.) Because in his agony in the Garden he was already forsaken by his God, he said: "O my Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me." (Matt. 26: 39.) O Father, all things are possible with thee, "let this chalice pass from me;" a prayer which he probably repeated numberless

times. Because at that hour he was already forsaken by his Father, hence that nameless anguish which seized his soul, hence the bloody sweat, which issued forth from every pore of his sacred Body. For this very reason, also, *an angel came down from heaven and comforted him*; for he would never have needed this exterior comfort, if the divine nature in him had not abstained from every comforting operation upon the human nature. But even the angel strengthened only the human will in Christ, without being permitted to communicate any light to his spirit, or any consolation to his heart.

2. In this terrible state of desolation and dereliction, our Blessed Lord endured all his sufferings in the houses of Annas and Caiphas, in the palaces of Pilate and Herod, in the streets of Jerusalem, and on Calvary's height. This was, so to speak, the seasoning or the soul of each individual torture. It is this that made all the other sufferings, true sufferings. If the blessed feeling that he still possessed the love and friendship of God in the highest degree, if the blessed feeling that, after a few hours, he would be admitted into the bosom of eternal glory, had penetrated him in a lively manner, it would have been an easy matter for him to suffer a thousand times more than he really suffered in his body. The Saints say, that there is nothing sweeter upon earth than to suffer for God in the consciousness of the love of God, supported and upheld by divine grace and consolation. But to suffer without any interior consolation, to suffer with the consciousness of being forsaken by God, is a terror of terrors. And in such a manner, Christ suffered from the beginning of his first agony on the cross. Therefore, every Christian must admit that our Blessed Lord suffered more than all men together can suffer; for though some martyrs suffered for a longer time, and endured, if possible, more cruel pains than he,—yet, while their bodies suffered, my brethren, their souls were filled with heavenly joy.

III. The abandonment of Jesus by God was not only the most painful, and long-continued of the sufferings of our Blessed Redeemer, but it was also *that wherein he manifested his most perfect love for his Eternal Father*. The proof of this is contained in the words: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

1. Consider attentively, dear brethren, *the time of his pronouncing this complaint*. It was not at the moment of his apprehension, nor of his scourging,—not at his crowning with thorns, nor his cruel crucifixion. During all the time that he was delivered to the power of men and of hell, not a word of complaint, on account of the terrible need of his soul, crossed his lips; no thought of complaint arose in the depths of his heart. The more severely God chastised him, the representative of sinners, the more humbly he submitted himself to his strokes. Only when the second

agony had already reached its highest point of torture, when the soul began to be separated from the body, and each moment threatened to be the last,—only when he thought that he would have to depart hence in this awful state of abandonment by God, only *then*, dear Christians, did he speak those heart-rending words: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” When the chalice of all earthly suffering was emptied to the very dregs, then, at last, his bursting Heart cries out for the removal of that overwhelming agony which threatens to extend even beyond the grave, into the dread eternity.—But this complaint in that last dark hour was, nevertheless, my brethren, no cry of indignation or impatience, no murmur of rebellion,—it was only the natural expression of the most affectionate desire, of the most incomprehensible love of God. For with the words: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” our Blessed Lord would say nothing else than: “I care not for all the sufferings of this world; even hell with all its horrors, pains, and inextinguishable fires would be endurable to me, my God, if I only were not forsaken by *thee*!” O what sublime language! What love! It is an incomprehensible language to us, re-echoed by many Saints in those sublime and heroic words: “*'Tis better to abide with God in hell, than dwell without him in heaven!*”

2. But, my brethren, let us not overlook the main point. Our Blessed Lord says: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Twice he lays a stress upon the little word “*My*”, thereby indicating in the clearest manner the strong and tender sentiments of his Sacred Heart. Hereby he gives us to understand those sentiments, as if expressed in these actual words: “Thou, O God, hast, indeed, forsaken me, but still thou art my God, my Love,—I shall never forsake thee. And even though I should be forsaken by thee forever; if, on account of the turpitude of the numberless sins which I have taken upon myself, I should never more find any favor in thy sight, nevertheless, thou shalt ever be my God, the God of my heart, my love, my all; I will remain obedient to thee for all eternity; it is thy honor, thy glory, thy will, alone, that I seek in all things!” He is resolved to love God even in that terrible hour, when, as surety for sinners, he feels himself forsaken by, and separated from God, (as it were), forever. Truly, this seems to be the highest degree of love to which Jesus could elevate himself. This is that obedience of which St. Paul speaks, when he says: “Christ debased himself, taking the form of a servant; he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2: 7, 8.) And in this, his boundless loving obedience, consists the chief merit of his Passion; in it consists his reparation for the outraged honor of God; in it, in fine, dear Christians, consists his atonement for the sins of the world.

3. To prove that it is not the fear of suffering, but simply the love of God and zeal for his honor that rules his heart, he immediately adds to his

complaint the words: "*I thirst,*" (John 19: 28); that is, "I do not refuse to suffer still longer; on the contrary, I have a burning thirst to suffer new, yea, even the most grievous and long continued sufferings for thy honor, O God, and for the salvation of men, my brethren."—He had scarcely declared in these words his readiness to embrace further torments, when the period of his painful dereliction and abandonment by God, had an end. The divine nature in him suddenly manifested again its sweet, comforting, and enlivening influence upon his human soul; a perfect ocean of delight was poured out over his blessed Humanity. The guilt of sin was wiped out; the divine justice was satisfied, and sinful man reconciled to his offended Creator. The God of mercy embraced his dying Son with infinite love, and pressed him, appeased, to the adorable, paternal Heart. And in that holy embrace, Jesus departed from this world with the joyous exclamation: "It is consummated." . . . "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (John 19: 30.—Luke 23: 46.) He had entered, my dear brethren, into the everlasting delights of Paradise.

But let us not forget, beloved Christians, that if Jesus suffered such tremendous and terrible torments, it was because he loved us poor sinners, because he wished to win a return of love from us. O, that we might fulfil the desire of his loving Heart, and, according to the words of the Apostle, *that we might no longer live to ourselves, but to him who has died for us!* But is it possible not to love so good a Lord, so amiable a Redeemer? Lacking this most natural, this most reasonable sentiment, should we not be regarded as monsters of men? Men without feeling, men without hearts, men, I should say, without the semblance of human nature? For in accordance with the law of our nature, love, everywhere, wins a return of love. If the infinite love of Jesus, alone, is unable to elicit from us a return of love,—must we not, with truth, be considered monsters of humanity? At the mere thought, at the bare possibility of such coldness and ingratitude towards our divine Saviour, the heart of St. Paul was so inflamed and fired with zealous indignation, that in the consuming ardor of his soul, he exclaimed: "*If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.*" (1. Cor. 16: 22.) This curse shall be verified in us also, if we do not glow with gratitude and love towards him who, in his supreme hour of dereliction and abandonment on the cross, became, through tender love, anathema for us. Only a gratefully-loving heart will obtain a share of that fruit of love which ripened on the cross; only a gratefully-loving heart will be cleansed from its sins by the blood of Christ; only a gratefully-loving heart will not be forsaken by Jesus in temptations, in trials, in crosses, and in sufferings;—yea, my dear brethren, will never be forsaken, neither in life, nor in death, nor in the awful hour of judgment. Amen.

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**EASTER SUNDAY.**

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THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS THE GROUNDWORK OF OUR FAITH, AND OUR MOST POWERFUL MOTIVE FOR LEADING A HOLY LIFE.

*“This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad, and rejoice therein.” Ps. 117: 24.*

These words of the Church express the joy which she manifests, and which she demands of all her children upon this glorious solemnity. Easter has not come upon us unprepared. We have labored for our Paschal joys, dear brethren, and we have a right now to partake of them. Easter, without doubt, is the greatest and gladdest of all the festivals of the Christian year, for it represents to us the accomplishment of our Redemption. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, and whatever he did during his earthly life, was done for no other purpose than to redeem and save mankind. According to the decree of Divine Providence, the work of our Redemption could be effected only by the death of Christ. It was only on the Cross that Christ could cry out to the world: “It is consummated.” But it was not enough that he suffered, it was not enough that he died for us; the seal of our faith was the divine seal of his Resurrection. His death, alone, could not wipe out the sins of his people; for if he did not rise again from the dead,—they were still unforgiven. The existence of the Catholic Church in the world is the best evidence that Christ rose from the dead, for it could never have been founded with Christ in the tomb; it could never have been founded on imperfect testimony. A living religion could never have been established on a dead Christ; and it is safe to say, that the religion that rests upon a living Christ, can never be superseded or destroyed. To-day, rising from the grave, and adorned with the marks of his sacred wounds, he appears, in the true sense of the word, as the Redeemer of the world. Sin is blotted out, the kingdom of Satan destroyed, the prince of this world cast out, the power of hell broken, and redeemed man can once more look up to heaven with confidence, and pray: “*Abba, Father!*” Hence, the joy which reigns supreme to-day in the whole Christian world; hence, the song of gladness and exultation which resounds throughout the Church: “Alleluia, this is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be glad, and rejoice therein;” for the Resurrection of Christ is

- I. The groundwork of our Faith, and*
- II. Our most powerful motive for leading a holy life.*

I. The Resurrection of Christ is the groundwork of our Faith, since no one can doubt the truth and divinity of our Faith, if Christ be risen again. The Prophets foretold that the Messiah would rise again from the dead. David says: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, (in the grave), nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption." (Ps. 15: 10.) There can be no doubt that this prophecy refers to Christ, for St. Peter applies it to him, using almost the same words: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption." (Acts 2: 27.) The prophet Isaias says, that the Gentiles shall beseech him, and that his sepulchre shall be glorious, (on account of his glorious Resurrection). "Him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious," (Is. 11: 10); and the prophet Osee says: "He will revive us after two days; on the third day, he will raise us up." (Osee 6: 3.) Now, if Christ be risen from the dead, the predictions of the Prophets are fulfilled, and he must truly be the promised Messiah.

Christ repeatedly and emphatically foretold that he would rise again from the dead on the third day. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man. For he shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon. And after they have scourged him, they will put him to death, and *the third day he shall rise again.*" (Luke 18: 31, 34.) "As Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." (Matt. 12: 40.) "This man said: I am able to destroy the temple of God, and in three days to rebuild it." (Matt. 26: 61.) "Vah, thou who destroyest the temple of God, and in three days buildest it up again." (Matt. 27: 40.) That the Jews, especially the Scribes and Pharisees, understood the full meaning of these prophecies, is evident from the fact that they applied to Pilate for a guard to watch the sepulchre, saying: "Sir, we have remembered, that that seducer said, while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day; lest his disciples come, and steal him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first." (Matt. 27: 63, 64.) If Christ had not risen from the dead on the third day, we could not believe him to be the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, because his prophecy was not fulfilled.

It is true, we have still other evidences, besides his Resurrection, of his Divinity and of his dignity of Messiah. One such evidence is *the holiness of his life*, which even his enemies acknowledged; for upon his question: "Which of you shall convince me of sin?" they held their peace. Judas confessed: "I have betrayed innocent blood;" and Pilate declared before the multitude of the people: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; look you to it." But, important as is this evidence of the holiness of Christ,

it would not of itself be conclusive, nor sufficient to place the truth of his Divinity beyond all doubt; for, since there are wolves in sheep's clothing, the incredulous might be tempted to suppose that the holiness of Christ was hypocritical, or only an outward semblance of sanctity. Our Lord also proved the authenticity of his divine mission *by miracles* ;—for he healed all kinds of diseases, and raised the dead to life; but many objections might be raised even against his miracles; one might say that they were only illusions and apparent marvels which he wrought in compact with and by the power of the devil. He says himself that false christs and false prophets would arise and do great signs and wonders, inasmuch as to deceive, if it were possible, even the elect.

If Christ had not risen from the dead, neither his sanctity nor his miracles could furnish conclusive evidence of the Divinity of his person and doctrine. His Resurrection, alone, removes every doubt. As he is risen from the dead, God, his Father, has given testimony to him that he is his only begotten Son, and as he raised himself from the dead by his own power, he immediately proved that he is true God; for such an act could be performed only by a God. The Resurrection of Christ, therefore, is the groundwork of our Faith. He who believes that Christ is risen from the dead, has no reason to doubt any article of faith. Hence, it was to this grand and glorious mystery that the Apostles chiefly appealed to convince the Jews and the Gentiles of the Divinity of our Lord, and of the truth of his doctrine. “If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, for you are yet in your sins.” (1. Cor. 15: 17.)

But is it certain beyond all doubt, dear brethren, that Christ rose from the dead? Who are the witnesses of his Resurrection? His enemies; namely, the soldiers who guarded the sepulchre, and the high Council of the Jews. The earth is rent, an angel descends from heaven, removes the heavy stone, and lays open the grave for the inspection of Christ's anxious adherents. Consternation seizes the guards; stunned, they fall upon the ground; they have scarcely recovered from their stupor, when they take to flight and hasten to the city, exclaiming: “Christ is risen!” It is more than probable that the members of the high Council contradicted their testimony, and reproached them with harsh words; but when the soldiers continued to repeat their assertion they were greatly confounded, and could find no other way of getting out of the predicament than by bribing the soldiers with a large sum of money, to induce them to circulate the falsehood, that his disciples came whilst they were asleep, and stole the body.

How likely! There probably never existed a more timid or demoralized set of men than were the disciples and followers of Jesus Christ on the night of his Agony and arrest. One betrayed him to his enemies; another denied him at the word of a mere servant-maid; all, ignominiously forsook him and fled away from him. They had continued with him during his miracles; they had heard him speak of his kingdom; some of them had

been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration; they had seen unclean spirits subject to him; they beheld life restored at his touch, and disease banished by his word. He had appeared before them as a grand divine personage, armed with all power and clothed with all grace. They had forsaken home and friends and business-pursuits to follow him, with great, indefinite hopes and anticipations that it was he who should redeem Israel; but they were without any intelligent estimate of his mission; and when they saw him in the hands of his enemies, and apparently helpless, a great panic seized them, and they literally gave him up,—together with all the sublime aspirations engendered by their intercourse with him.

This, however, was but the beginning of the tragedy. Calvary, with its cross, stood directly before them; and the infamy and cruelty of his death were consummated there amid such convulsions of nature as might well signalize one of the most shameful events in the history of human injustice and crime. The great religious Teacher and Prophet had died the death of a malefactor, hanging between two thieves. He had manifested none of the power which he claimed, though taunted by the mob at that supreme moment, and called upon to save himself, if he, indeed, were the person he professed to be. After he was found to be dead, Joseph of Arimathea took down his lifeless body, and buried it. A stone was rolled to the opening of the sepulchre and sealed; and then the timid and terrified disciples hid themselves in doubt and dismay. They were, undoubtedly, in deep sorrow; for they had loved their Master, and had built great hopes upon him. But during those three days after his burial, the Christian religion was as dead as he who had undertaken to found it. Every hope of his followers was buried in that tomb; and not one of their hopes would ever have revived, had he failed to come out of it. And this is the thought that I wish to engrave on your minds, to-day,—that the existence of Christianity at this moment is a positive proof of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christianity could never have been established except on the fact of Christ's Resurrection. The story of his disappearance from the tomb, and his re-appearance among his disciples, is familiar to all; it was incredible at first to the disciples, but they saw him, they heard him speak; he came and went among them; he appeared and disappeared at will, gave them his message and their mission; promised to be with them all days, even to the consummation of the world, and finally ascended into heaven in their sight.

The Apostle of the Gentiles in writing to the Corinthians, says of Christ that he was seen by Peter, then by the twelve, subsequently by five hundred brethren at once, most of whom were living at the time that the letter of St. Paul was written. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the Apostles again, and lastly, by Paul himself. What wonder, then, that these men were ready to die in their devotion to the Master whom they had seen conquering death, and whom they had known as an immortal

leader! The Apostles and disciples knew what they had seen, what their hands had touched; they were sure of what they were talking about. It really was no matter of faith with them at all. It was a matter of fact, lying indestructibly in their memories, and vitalizing all their lives. Hence, their great enthusiasm.

II. The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our faith, dear Christians, but it, also, encourages us to fulfil the divine will under all circumstances, with Christian fidelity; it is, in fact, the most powerful incentive to a holy life. "My food is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perform his work." (John 4: 34.) Our Saviour could say this in truth, for his whole life upon earth was one continual, uninterrupted fulfilment of the will of his heavenly Father. For thirty years, he leads a hidden life, because his Father wills it; he begins his public life, goes about teaching and working miracles, and finally dies on the cross amidst unspeakable tortures and sufferings, because it is the will of his Father. Thus the human will of Christ was entirely subject to the will of God; he did everything that God willed, and always in the manner, and time, and place, that he willed it. How gloriously do we see him rewarded for this faithful accomplishment of the divine will! To-day, coming forth from the grave with a glorified body, "God hath exalted him and hath given him a name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of his Father." (Phil. 2: 9-11.) What a sublime end! What a glorious reward! If we consider our risen Redeemer in the state of his glory, must we not also, dear brethren, be encouraged to do the will of God in evil as well as in good days? What does not man do to procure for himself a life of ease and comfort upon earth? What hardships, what perils and humiliations, does he not undergo, not only for days and weeks, but for years? How, then, can we be so dilatory in doing the will of God, knowing as we do, that if we work and suffer with Christ, we shall be glorified with him?

The Resurrection of our divine Lord incites us to wage a continual war against the enemies of our salvation. The life of Christ was a continual warfare against Satan. He had come to crush the serpent's head, to destroy the power of the devil, and redeeming us from the thralldom of centuries, to recover for us the bright inheritance which we had lost by sin; hence, Satan resisted with all his might; and a continual combat and struggle was the result. In the desert, where he thrice tempted our Lord, and was thrice ignominiously overcome, the Arch-Enemy discovered that it was impossible for him to prevail, single-handed, against the Son of God; he, therefore, looked about for confederates to help him frustrate our Saviour's designs for the redemption of mankind. And he found willing tools in the

Scribes and Pharisees, as well as among the Jews in general. What had not Christ to suffer from them? How often did they not lay snares to catch him in his speech? How often did they calumniate, blaspheme, and insult him in order to render him odious, and destroy the confidence of the people in him! They did not shrink even from brute force in their malice, for more than once they were about to lay violent hands on him, and to take his life. But his hour had not yet come. Finally, the devil entered into Judas, who betrayed his Lord and Master for a paltry sum of money, and delivered him into the hands of his enemies. The august Victim dies upon the cross; hell is apparently successful, its blind instruments exult in their triumph, believing that they have conquered and destroyed the Name of Jesus for ever. But the intoxication of that triumph is of short duration. Easter Sunday proclaims a stupendous victory, such as heaven and earth never before witnessed. Jesus rises from the dead, glorious and immortal; the nations of the earth, from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, adore him as the true God; Judaism and Paganism fall before the cross; and the kingdom of Christ is spread throughout the entire universe.

Warfare, my dear brethren, is our lot upon earth. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare, and his days are like the days of a hireling." We carry about with us an enemy within the gates, an internal foe, our own concupiscence, which prevents us from reposing in God, and which prepares for us many violent temptations and trials. We must fight against the devil who, full of hatred and envy, pursues us continually, and everywhere lays his insidious snares, seeking our ruin. We live in a world which endeavors to seduce us by false maxims, scandals, and bad examples. Especially, my brethren, in these our days, infidels and freethinkers do their utmost to drive religion and the fear of God out of our hearts. Who can listen to their language without a shudder? Who can read their books and periodicals without being horrified by their hatred of Christianity? But let us not be of little faith; Christ who crushed the head of the serpent, forsakes not his Church; his victory is our victory; he has merited for us the grace to overcome every enemy. Let us gather round the banner of the Cross, dear brethren, and no power, either of man or devil, can harm us. And what a triumph, if we prove brave warriors in the fight! We shall enter with him into his glory and receive that great reward of which he says himself: "To him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life," which is in the paradise of my God!

The Resurrection of Christ is the pledge and type, dear Christians, of our own future resurrection. Christ is our Head, we are his members; what has been done with the Head, must also be done with the members. As certain as Christ is risen, so certain it is that we shall rise again. "If Christ be preached that he rose again from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection

of the dead, then Christ is not risen again." Christ is, also, the type of our resurrection. "Our Lord Jesus Christ will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory." The bodies of the just, therefore, after their resurrection will resemble the body of the risen Christ; they, in their turn, will be glorified, become impassible, immortal, spiritualized; and, (united with the soul,) will enjoy an unspeakable felicity in heaven.

Strange it is, *that our only true comfort and joy should come forth from the grave!* Yet so it is. By the Resurrection of Christ, all our woes are healed. A new and immortal life springs from the sepulchre of Jesus. Christ is risen, dear brethren. We believe that the Son of God is risen and that our sins are pardoned. Christ is risen; death loses its power to separate Christians. "Woman, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou?" Mourn no longer. It is the gladsome Easter-day. Believe and rejoice. Forsake your sins, and rejoice. Bury your dead, and rejoice in hope; for they are not dead, but sleeping. The former things are passed away; all things are become new. "This is the day which the Lord hath made, let us be glad and rejoice therein." This is the Lord's Passover; the Red Sea of his Passion is crossed; we are delivered out of the bondage of Egypt, and are marching on to the Promised Land. O glorious Easter! Mary Magdalene has been at the sepulchre at the dawning of thy light, and has seen the Lord. O glorious Easter! The stubborn heart of man is redeemed, the Father's wrath is averted, a pathway into heaven is opened for us. That immortal charter of Redemption which releases us from the thralldom of centuries, having been sealed by his agonies and precious blood, and countersigned by his Resurrection, is handed over to us in these words of the risen God: "Peace be with you."

Is it Easter, my dear brethren, with *you*? Is it, indeed, a day of joy and peace for you? Or are you cold, dead to spiritual things? Are you still, perhaps, not even in the state of grace, but hugging still the chains which bind you to sin and Satan? O, claim your privileges as Christians; rise from the grave of sin, rise to a new life,—and on this blessed Easter festival, resolve, once for all, henceforth to seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Amen.

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## EASTER SUNDAY.

## THE TRIPLE PROOFS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

*“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; he is risen; he is not here.” Mark. 16: 6.*

The day of tears and mourning, of blood and wounds, of tortures and death is over. The Man of Sorrows, like a giant, has finished his course. He is dead. The grave is closed with a massive stone, and for greater security the seal of public authority is put upon it. All is silence and darkness. The friends of the dead Christ having beheld his lifeless body in the tomb, return from Joseph's garden, bewailing him as one among the departed. His enemies triumph for the time being. But what sudden change is this, my brethren? There is an unusual excitement in the garden of the holy Sepulchre. Something extraordinary happened there this morning. The Crucified Jesus who was truly dead, arose from his grave as from a trance. A bright and beautiful angel said to the women who came early in the morning to embalm the dead body of the Lord: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he is risen; he is not here.” What joyful news to his friends, what terrible tidings to his enemies, who had left no means untried to rid themselves of their Victim.

The friends and enemies of Christ were equally interested in establishing the truth of his Resurrection. To us, also, my brethren, it is of the greatest importance to secure an incontrovertible proof of this mystery, for the Apostle says: “If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have given testimony against God that he hath raised up Christ whom he had not raised up.” (1. Cor. 15: 14, 15.) On the truth of the Resurrection of Christ our faith, our hopes of salvation are based. My purpose, therefore, dear brethren, is to prove to you, to-day, the Resurrection of Christ

- I. *By the testimony of his friends,*
- II. *By the contradictions of his enemies, and*
- III. *By the presence of Jesus in all parts of the world.*

I. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had provided for the burial of Christ. But, as the eve of the Sabbath was approaching, all preparations for our Lord's interment had to be made in haste, since, according to the law of the Jews, every kind of work was forbidden on the Sabbath day.

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome, were present at the burial; and, agreeably to the customs of their nation, they wished to embalm his body, but not having time on account of the approach of the Sabbath, they concluded to return to the tomb early in the morning of the first day of the week, and then perform their sacred duty. Accordingly, very early on the third day after the burial, before the rising of the sun, these three holy women hastened with spices to the grave. Going, they recollected the massive stone which covered the entrance of the sepulchre, and they said to each other: "Who will roll us back the stone from the grave?" But drawing nearer the place, they behold the stone removed, and the sepulchre open. They are frightened at the sight, and their first thought is that the body has been stolen. Magdalene immediately runs back to tell Peter and John that the body of their Divine Master is not to be found. The other two women, meanwhile, enter the sepulchre, and there encounter a bright and beautiful angel in the form of a young man, who says to them: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; he is risen; he is not here."

Peter and John being told by Magdalene that the body of the Lord had been stolen, hasten to the sepulchre, and discover nothing of their missing Master save the linen grave-clothes, and the napkin that had been about his sacred head. They go away again. But Magdalene,—faithful, loving Magdalene,—stood without the sepulchre, weeping bitterly. Looking up presently, she saw two angels in white, who said to her: "Woman, why weepest thou?" She made answer: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Without waiting for a reply from them, turning, she saw Jesus standing beside her. But she knew not that it was Jesus. The Risen Lord said to her: "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Thinking that it was the gardener, she said to him: "Sir, if thou hast taken him away, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her: "Mary." She exclaimed: "Rabboni," (that is, Master), and fell down at his feet; but he said to her: "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go, and tell my disciples what you have seen."

Reports came in from all sides that the Divine Master had appeared in several places; and shortly after, when the disciples were assembled together, (the doors being shut for fear of the Jews,) Jesus came, and standing in the midst of them, said: "Peace be to you." All the Apostles saw him, save Thomas, who was absent at the time. On his return, being told by the other disciples, that they had seen the Lord, he did not believe, but said: "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and my hand into his side, I will not believe."

After eight days, when Thomas was within, Jesus appeared again, and said to Thomas: "Put in thy finger hither and see my hands, and bring

hither thy hand and put it into my side, and be not incredulous but faithful." Thomas said: "My Lord and my God." Thus, by his doubt and incredulity which were dissipated by the action of Christ, St. Thomas has convinced many hearts of the truth of our Lord's Resurrection.

Late in the evening of that first Easter-day, Christ met two of his disciples on their way to Emmaus. At another time, he appeared to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias when they were fishing, and asked them if they had anything to eat. They answered: "No." He told them to cast out the net on the right side of the ship; they did so, and caught one hundred and fifty-three great fishes; and afterwards, they ate together. Before he ascended into heaven, he appeared, in short, my brethren, to five hundred men, who all saw and heard him, that they might give testimony to the reality of his Resurrection.

What the Evangelists relate is short, but natural and true. The Apostles had given him up as lost, when they beheld him close his blessed eyes in death upon the cross; and they only believed in his Resurrection after they had been convinced of it by the evidence of their senses. When nothing is needed but eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to touch, can there yet remain any room for doubt? What did the disciples gain by asserting that Christ had risen from the dead? Nothing. Nevertheless, they spread the fact of the Resurrection of Christ—not after the lapse of many years when it would be difficult or impossible to find the original eye-witnesses of the event, but immediately after it had transpired, when all the witnesses thereof were living and accessible, and whilst the occurrence was yet fresh in the memory of the people. They did not speak of it among themselves as a secret, or as a hear-say rumor, but as a notorious fact, to which all Jerusalem might give testimony. They mentioned the eye-witnesses of the Resurrection by name, and were ready not only to confirm by oath the truth of that mystery, but, (what was still more convincing), to lay down their lives for it. Are such witnesses not worthy to be believed?

II. My brethren, if after this, any unbelievers are to be found who doubt the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, their incredulity does little honor to their hearts or heads. We must necessarily suspect that there are other reasons why they refuse to believe this truth. Jesus was always a stumbling-block to such unhappy persons,—therefore, they tried by every means in their power to rid themselves of him; and they exulted when he lay cold and dead in Joseph's garden-tomb. Now, however, it is on every lip that he is risen. Their case becomes desperate; they can no longer persecute, scourge, and crucify the Son of God; he has proved himself truly God; he dies no more. The Mighty Lord who penetrated the inmost recesses of their hearts, and disclosed the depths of their hypocrisy and malice, is living in all his power and wisdom. A terrible apparition, a sad surprise which changes their brief Paschal joy into sadness and dismay. Friends

and enemies, alike, behold Jesus after his Resurrection. His friends declare that he lives, his enemies contradict that assertion,—yet, in such a manner that their denial only serves to bear testimony to the truth.

The Evangelist records that on the day following our Lord's Crucifixion, the chief priests and Pharisees recollected that he himself had foretold his Resurrection from the dead after three days. They, therefore, went to Pilate, saying: "Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said, while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day; lest his disciples come and steal him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead; so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said to them: You have a guard, go and guard it as you know. And they departing, made the sepulchre secure, with guards, sealing the stone." (Matt. 27: 63-66.) This precaution taken by the Jews is highly advantageous to the cause of truth, for if they had neglected to guard the tomb, it might very naturally have been surmised after the Resurrection of Jesus, that his disciples came in the night, and stole his body. How could such a suspicion have been refuted? But now, behold, the sepulchre is made secure, the seal of public authority is put upon it, and guards are placed around it, whose bounden duty it is to prevent any one from coming near the tomb, much less stealing away the sacred corpse interred therein.

It is midnight's solemn hour; all Jerusalem sleeps; in Joseph's garden nothing is heard but the steps of the sentry, who walks up and down before the sepulchre. On a sudden, the guards hear a noise issuing from the interior of the tomb, and becoming louder and louder like the roar of an earthquake. An angel descends from heaven in dazzling array, and removes the stone; and, lo! Jesus ascends into the air visible and triumphant! The affrighted guards flee into the city to bear the terrible news to their employers and superiors. The Pharisees and chief-priests call a meeting of the council to deliberate as to what should next be done. The people know that soldiers had been detailed to watch the sepulchre for the very purpose of preventing the body from being surreptitiously taken away; now the fable of Christ's body having been stolen by his disciples will hardly be believed. There is no time for long deliberations and debates; something must be done, and quickly too, for Jesus walks already visibly among men. Some have seen him, and spoken to him; the startling news is in every one's mouth. Nevertheless, they bribe the soldiers with money, charging them to say that his disciples came and stole the body while they, themselves, were asleep. If the governor should seek to punish them for such a neglect of duty, the members of the council agree to take all the responsibility upon themselves, and to settle the matter with him in a manner satisfactory to the guards.

The soldiers take the money, and tell the lie. Strange, indeed, that these sages and doctors of Jerusalem were unable to invent a more ingen-

ous lie than that of the sleeping guards. The question naturally arises: were some few asleep only, or were all asleep at the same time? Were not some, at least one or two who were on duty, awake, so that at the least noise they might be able to rouse their companions from their sleep? Could an earthquake take place so noiselessly as not to awaken them? And if, on awaking, they found that the stone had been removed, the grave opened, and the body stolen, whence did or could they know, that his disciples had taken away the body of Jesus? And, finally, if they knew for certain that the disciples had done it, why were not the latter arrested at once by the civil authorities and severely punished for breaking the public seal, as well as for fraud and imposition in having stolen the body of their Master, that they might preach him as risen? Why does the High Council do nothing to probe the mystery to the bottom, in order to ascertain its truth or falsehood? The Apostles were not men with whom the Jewish authorities were accustomed to deal ceremoniously; they were poor, friendless creatures who, without much formality, could be arrested and locked up at any moment. Why, I ask, were these audacious violators of the public seal, these bold thieves of the body of Christ, allowed for fifty days to go about unmolested and preach unchecked, that Jesus had risen from the dead? Why are they not silenced? This indulgence to the Apostles, this remarkable forbearance with them in an affair of such paramount importance, manifests that the enemies of Jesus understood only too well, how strong and convincing were the proofs of Christ's Resurrection. During the time that Jesus remained upon earth, he and his disciples were left unmolested; it was only after the Divine Master had ascended into heaven that the Jews took courage to persecute his followers. They entered the arena against his doctrine and his Church, and were sorely worsted. Their crusade was barren of victory. After eighteen centuries of trial, Jesus stands unconquered in his doctrine and his Church, whilst the synagogue of his persecutors is buried in oblivion.

But could not this doubt arise in a candid soul? When the Jews heard from the soldiers that Jesus was risen, they could not resist the truth, but had to believe. Hence, the event could not have happened in such an extraordinary manner. To this I answer: The Jews were men blinded by their passions; with open eyes they saw not; feeling, with outstretched hands, they felt not. Jesus had once healed a man who had been born blind, and whom they had known from his infancy, yet they refused to believe it, lest they might be compelled to admit the truth of the miracle. Instead of believing, they thrust the man out of the temple. Lazarus had been four days in the grave. Jesus approached the spot which was surrounded by a multitude of people, both friends and enemies. He prays to his Eternal Father, and says: "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus comes forth from death, alive and well. His enemies behold this miracle wrought before their eyes; they relate it to others, but instead of being convinced

by it of the divinity of Jesus, they burn with anger and envy, and conspire to take away his life, so that the whole people may not believe in him.

Suppose, my brethren, that Jesus, after his Resurrection, had appeared to his enemies, would they have believed in him? They would not have been able to deny that he actually lived, but, nevertheless, they would not have believed in him. They would have grown pale with fear and terror, but their hearts would only have become more hardened. When passion entirely governs a man, no reason, no conviction, can penetrate his darkened soul; he only aims at his pernicious ends, and rejects every warning which is calculated to save him. The Scribes and Pharisees must be enemies of Jesus as long as they remain what they are. He frequently upbraided them with their hypocrisy and crimes; and as they were unwilling to cast off the bondage of their sins, they persevered in hatred against him. Hence, the proposition of Judas to betray his master was a very welcome and agreeable one to them. And after Judas repented of his wicked deed and returned the money crying out, as he did so, that he had sinned in betraying innocent blood, they took the money from him, it is true, but they did not set Jesus at liberty. They said to Judas: "What is that to us, look thou to it." (Matt. 27: 4.) Guilty or innocent, it was all the same to them. The Lord Jesus must die. After his Resurrection, they are still unchanged. To defeat that glorious miracle, they bribed the Roman soldiers to tell a lie. Truly, wickedness has betrayed itself.

III. The truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is clearly proved by the testimony of his friends and the contradictions of his enemies. But we were not present on that occasion, we were not eye-witnesses of that sublime fact, and yet we, too, can convince ourselves with our own eyes that Christ lives. It is our own fault if we do not see the risen Jesus, for he is visible all over the world. He lives. A dead Jesus avails us nothing; having lost life by sin, we need a living Jesus to give us life again. We know for certain that Jesus lives, and we know it with greater certitude than the Apostles did, to whom he appeared after his Resurrection and with whom he remained forty days. We know that Jesus has lived among us not only forty days, but for the last eighteen hundred years; from the hour of his Resurrection to the present hour, he lives in his Church, which he governs and guides by his Spirit, and with whom he has promised to abide all days, even to the consummation of the world. Travel through the world in every direction, and, all over the earth, you will find at intervals, now a large, now a small church; you will find houses adorned with the cross, the symbol of salvation, in valleys, on hills, and on the tops of mountains; in villages, towns, and cities. These thousands upon thousands of churches, scattered all over the globe are so many branches of that glorious Tree, of which Christ is the root and the trunk.

This is the work of Jesus; he had foretold before his Crucifixion, that,

after three days, he would rise again from the dead, and remain with his Church through all time, even to the consummation of the world. What doubt can we yet entertain, my brethren, when we see his Church flourishing for the last eighteen hundred years? He built that Church upon a rock, and he promised to abide with her for ever. She has withstood all the attacks made by Jews, Pagans, infidels, heretics, and bad Catholics for eighteen hundred years; and has come forth victorious from all trials and persecutions. She will stand, and grow, and flourish, until the end of time, because Jesus is her Corner-stone and Chief Pastor. He who has said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," he, himself, hath promised to be with his Church all days, even to the consummation of the world.

Jesus is risen from the dead; this truth, dear Christians, is the groundwork of our faith; for if Christ be not risen again, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins; of all beings, we are in fact, the most hopeless and the most miserable.

But now, Christ being risen again, (the first fruit of them that sleep,)—those who have slept and are sleeping in Christ, have not perished, but will be raised up by him upon the last day. Christ is risen, and he lives among us. We see him in the priest as teacher, and we hear him speak in sermons; we see him in the Confessional as judge of our consciences; we hear him absolve us from our sins. "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee." (Matt. 9: 2.) We see him on the altar offered to his eternal Father as an unbloody sacrifice; we see and receive him in holy Communion. We see and hear him in our dying hour, when by the mouth of the priest he speaks to us words of consolation, and by the merits of his Passion and Death strengthens us for our final journey, and gives himself to us as a Viaticum. And thus, dying in his name, and with his name upon our lips; being laid as he was in the darkness and silence of the grave, we hope according to his promise to rise again on the last day, and with all the blessed spirits to be admitted into the heavenly Jerusalem, there to praise and glorify forever the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

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**LOW SUNDAY.**

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

*“Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose you shall retain, they are retained.”*

*St. John 20: 22, 23.*

The enemies of the Catholic Church, my dear brethren, often speak of Confession, but as a rule, it is badly understood and, consequently, not unfrequently misrepresented. What is Penance (or Confession)?

“Penance is a Sacrament in which the priest, as God’s representative, forgives sins, when the sinner is heartily sorry for them, sincerely confesses them, and is willing to do penance for them.”

On the part of the penitent, then, three things are necessary: first, confession; second, sorrow; and lastly, willingness to do penance.

Now, if this is the true definition of penance, (as it is, since it is taken from one of our standard works), what shall we say of the objection which conveys the idea: Catholics may unburden themselves in the confessional, and then go back and get another load of sin? To use a familiar phrase, the very definition, knocks the objection “sky-high.” Can a man be heartily sorry, if he intends to commit the same offence again? It is a contradiction. Sorrow presupposes amendment. Shall we, then, attribute the objection to ignorance or malice? Let charity prevail, though to all appearances we must often encounter the ugly horns of malice.

But we are told, priests introduced Confession. To meet this objection, I shall use the following line of argument:

- I. *Priests could not do so without detection after Christ and the Apostles;*
- II. *They would not do it, even if they could;*
- III. *The history of the Christian ages attests the existence of the confessional; and*
- IV. *The Bible, that great Protestant safety-valve, teaches plainly and unequivocally that Christ conferred upon man the power of forgiving sins.*

Should I succeed in proving all this, then, I think, there could be no reasonable doubt as to the necessity of confessing one’s sins to a priest to obtain absolution.

I. Priests could not introduce Confession without detection after Christ and the Apostles.

It is natural, my dear brethren, to conceal our imperfections before men. The girl says to herself: "What will mamma say, should she find it out?" The boy will do many things in secret which he would not do, were he within the reach of a watchful father's eye. The wife has great confidence in her husband, but some things are so deeply buried in her own bosom that his suspicions are not even aroused. The husband, too, has his secrets hoarded up in a chest, securely locked. Under the cover of darkness, many crimes are remorselessly committed which, in broad daylight, would bring the blush of shame to the cheeks of the perpetrators. It is true, we ought to fear God more than man, but we must stare the fact in the face and take men as they are, not as they ought to be. A large percentage exclaim: "What will the people say?" What *God* says is not taken into consideration; hence, (what no man will deny,) that general repugnance to the revelation of sins committed in secret.

Suppose now, I were to take it into my head to introduce Confession; suppose further that I were to get up into the pulpit next Sunday, and say: My friends! after this you must confess your sins to me to have them forgiven; the carpenters have already been ordered to put up a confessional; every man, woman, and child must come and tell me the secrets of the heart—the sins of thought, word, deed, and omission; if you have overreached your neighbor in a business transaction, you must tell me so; if you have been unfaithful to your wife, you must make it known to me. In short, you must unfold to me your hearts, that I may see the secret workings thereof.

Tell me, what would the Rockport people say to this? Would they not say: "Our priest must be "cranky"—a fit subject for the lunatic asylum? His predecessors have never said anything about Confession; if he wishes to go himself, very well; *we* are not going—it is an innovation." Would I not subject myself to a large dose of ridicule on the part of the Rockport Catholics? But suppose, my influence over the congregation were so great that they would submit without a murmur—not to speak of a revolution—is it reasonable to suppose that other priests and other congregations would submit unconditionally? Indeed, not. On the other hand, would not my name be handed down on the pages of history? Fifty years hence, would not the enemies of the Church, of whom there always has been a respectable number, hurl into the teeth of every Catholic that there and then such a priest introduced Confession—obligated all the Catholics in the land, priests, bishops, and popes not excepted, to confess their sins?

But I defy any non-Catholic to lay his finger on that page of history, which tells us when, where, and by whom Confession was introduced after Christ and the Apostles. If it was done, we would find the traces of it on the pages of history. Some people always have objected, and always will

object to burthensome innovations. Indeed, Protestants feel the force of this argument; hence, they tried to saddle the innovation on some one. But, as in everything else, they fail to agree. Consequently, we find Confession laid at the door of parties who not only lived hundreds of miles apart, but between whom even a number of centuries elapsed. Many accuse Innocent III., A. D. 1215. It is true, he made the law "that every Catholic must go to Confession *at least* once a year," but does it follow from that that he introduced Confession itself? Suppose a father were to say to his son, twelve years of age: "You must eat your breakfast every morning at five o'clock;" would it not be ridiculous, to draw the conclusion that the son had never before eaten his breakfast? Consequently, priests could not have introduced Confession after Christ and the Apostles.

II. If priests could, my brethren, they would not have done it. Man's highest ambition seems to be to take this world as easy as possible. The farmer will not carry the cradle when he can have a reaper. The tailor imagines he cannot do his work without a sewing-machine. The tourist will not travel to Louisville in a coach drawn by a yoke of unruly oxen, if he can pay for his passage on the beautiful steamer, James Guthrie. In short, all men study to do, with the least possible exertion, as much work as possible. But what reason have you to believe that priests form an exception to the general rule? They are capable of enjoying easy times as well as other people. Humanly speaking, would they not be the greatest fools that ever walked on earth, were they to put an unnecessary burden upon themselves? To hear Confession is a burden. In larger congregations, we find penitents in the church every morning. Now to rise early, to enter a cold church for the purpose of hearing confessions, when Protestant ministers, at the same time, are enjoying the comforts of a warm bed, is no pleasure. To inhale the breath of two or three hundred people on a hot summer day, to speak for hours in a whisper, may be considered a little entertainment by an inexperienced preacher, but the experienced priest says it is hard work. To travel for miles at midnight, regardless of roads and the inclemencies of the weather; to hear the confessions of small-pox and yellow-fever cases, when other ministers are running for their lives under the pretext of saving their families, is certainly, speaking from a natural standpoint, no amusement to the priest—he stares the danger in the face—he never runs. But suppose, for the sake of argument, a certain eccentric priest looked upon all this as a source of enjoyment, could he have induced all other priests to take the same view of the matter? Indeed, no; objections would have been raised on every side. But please, my dissenting friends, *do* mention the names of some of those who objected, when Confession was introduced. I shall not answer the five-dollar-objection (for forgiving sins), because only personified ignorance could raise it. Consequently, priests would not introduce Confession, even if they could do so.

III. The history of all Christian ages, my brethren, attests the existence of the confessional.

Some Protestants accuse Pope Innocent III. of having introduced Confession A. D. 1215. Hence, they themselves admit that the practice of confessing sins to a priest is over six hundred years old. Consequently, I need not bring historical proofs for the last six centuries. To save time and labor, I shall even pass over seven centuries prior to 1215, though I might quote such authorities as St. Bernard, St. Anselm, and St. Climachus, not to speak of many others. The nearer we can trace Confession to Christ and the Apostles, the better it is. Hence, I prefer to call the Fathers of the very first centuries to the witness-stand.

St. Augustine of the fifth century says: "Let no one say to himself: I do penance to God in private, I do it before God. Is it in vain, that Christ has said 'whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven?' Is it in vain, that the keys have been given to the Church? Do we make void the Gospel? void the words of Christ?" (Serm. 392, c. 3.)

St. Jerome in A. D. 420, declares: "The Bishop and the priest, having heard as his duty requires, the various qualities of sins, he understands who should be bound, who should be loosed." (Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matt., c. 16, v. 19.)

St. John Chrysostom, earlier still, in 407, exhorts his hearers: "Do not confess to me only of fornication, nor of those things that are manifest among men; but bring together also thy own calumnies and evil speaking . . . and all such things." (41st Homil. [al. 42d] on St. Matt., v. 4.)

Again: "To the priests is given a power which God would not grant either to angels or archangels; inasmuch as what priests do below, God ratifies above, and the Master confirms the sentence of his servants . . . For he says, 'Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained!' What power, I ask, can be greater than this?" (3d Book on the Priesthood.)

St. Ambrōse, of the fourth century, also, says: "But they say, we show reverence to the Lord, by reserving to him, alone, the power of forgiving sins. Now, no one can more grievously offend him, than they who would annul his commands and throw upon him the duty given to themselves. For since the Lord Jesus, himself, has said in his Gospel: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained;' who is it who honors him the more, he that obeys his commands, or he that resists them?" (De Poen. L. 1, c. 2, v. 6.)

Attend again to the dictum of St. Basil: "We must absolutely reveal our sins to those who have received the dispensation of the mysteries of God." (Apud. Libermann, c. 4, p. 177.)

It is true, most Protestants admit that the Church at this period was yet pure and incorrupt. But let us continue our research, my dearly beloved,

until we land on the very threshold of the apostolic age;—there is nothing like believing as the Apostles did.

Origen, of the third century, declares: “If we are sorry for our sins, and if we confess them not only to God, but also to those, who have a remedy for them, then they shall be forgiven us.” (Homil. 11, in p. 47.)

Tertullian, of the second century, makes short work of a bad confession, as follows: “Several fail to tell their sins because they are more concerned about their honor, than about their salvation . . . . What is better, to conceal your sins and be damned, or to make them known and be saved?” (De Poenit., c. 10.)

In the first century, St. Clement, the disciple of and successor to St. Peter, says: “St. Peter taught that we must reveal even the bad thoughts to the priests.” (Epist. 11 ad Corinth.)

What reply do you think I once received from a gentleman when I quoted this passage? “My God! I should hate to know all the bad thoughts of Rockport!”

Here, then, we stand on the very threshold of the Apostles, and we are told, my brethren, that we must confess even bad thoughts to a priest. By whom are we told this? By a disciple of St. Peter. If this doctrine is not true, we are bound to come to the conclusion, either that St. Peter was a poor instructor, or that St. Clement paid no attention to the instructions given. Is it reasonable to suppose that the Church already at this period, is teaching false doctrines; at a period when the words of the Apostles are still resounding in the ears, and are yet fresh in the minds of the people? Indeed, not—there would certainly be derived little consolation in such case, from the words of the Saviour: “I will be with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.”

Consequently, history attests the existence of the confessional.

IV. Non-Catholics say: Give us the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing else but the Bible. Very well, let us see what the Bible says.

In the Gospel of St. John, we read: “Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” (20: 21-23.)

The Saviour had great power, but he confers this power upon his Apostles: “As the Father hath sent me, I also send you.” He breathed on them. Is that a meaningless demonstration—mere buffoonery? He tells them to receive the Holy Ghost. Why? Because they have a great work before them—they are to forgive sins: “whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.”

But you, my friends, may say: That is not the meaning. What, then, is the meaning? We must pardon our personal offenders. In the first place, how do you know *the* meaning? If the Bible, and only the Bible, as you

say, is the rule of faith, have I not as much right to my explanation as you to yours? Yes, my note is secured by such men as Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Basil, John, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, and a host of others, light-bearers in the first ages of the Church; whereas, yours is not indorsed. Consequently, my assertion is worth more than yours. In court, the preponderance of evidence would surely be on my side of the house. In the second place, your explanation must be false, because God commands us to love and pardon our enemies "seventy times seven," in other words, times without number. He, himself, has given us a glorious example. But in the above text, Christ speaks of two things: *Forgiving* and *retaining*, or not forgiving. Would not our condition be sad in the extreme, my dear brethren, if the forgiveness of our sins in all cases depended on our enemies? How many of us, alas! would have to appear unpardoned before the bar of divine justice? It is blasphemous to say, that God conferred upon the Apostles a power to be used at random—according to caprice. Hence, the forgiving and retaining power presupposes judgment. But since the Apostles were not omniscient, how could they form a correct judgment without confession? An honorable judge never condemns a criminal without a hearing.

However, this passage from St. John is not the only Biblical text on the subject. In St. Matthew we read: "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (18: 18.) This passage, too, presupposes judgment, and judgment presupposes knowledge; otherwise, the wrong man might be bound. Think of a court binding an innocent man, hand and foot! Those, my dear Christians, who have familiarized themselves with the Fathers of the primitive Church, will readily perceive that they based Confession upon this text.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find what follows:

"And many of those who believed, came *confessing* and declaring their deeds." (19: 18.)

St. James says: "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests (*elders* in Prot. Bible) of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man; and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess, therefore, your sins one to another." (5: 14-16.) "Confess"?—but to whom? To those brought in, of course. And who are brought in? The priests of the Church.

It is true, in the Protestant Bibles, printed since A. D. 1562, we find the word "priest" changed into "elders." Then, as now, the Bible was changed to suit the times. It looks somewhat suspicious to a Catholic to see the same Greek word translated "*priest*", when Jewish or pagan priests are spoken of, whereas it is translated "*elder*" when mention is made of the same personage in the New dispensation. However, and only for the

sake of argument, let us suppose that "elder" is the proper translation of the Greek. You get seriously sick; you send for an "elder," five miles off; he comes; do you confess to him? No, we confess to one another. Well, if one elder confesses to another elder, is not that confessing "one to another?" Furthermore, why did you send for the elder? Does it not place him in an awkward position when he sees you reposing more confidence in a lay-member than in himself? Oh, consistency! what a precious jewel thou art!

IV. Let us now, my brethren, consider still further the objections which non-Catholics advance against Confession.

1. We admit, they say, that the Apostles had the power to forgive sins, but that power ended with their death.

Why so? Were no more sins committed after the last Apostle gave up the ghost? If the forgiveness of sins was necessary in the apostolic age, it is so yet. Are we God's step-children? Furthermore, Christ's Church was not established in favor of a particular people, but for all nations throughout all ages. "Preach the Gospel to every creature. Behold, I will be with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." Consequently, if the Apostles had the power to forgive sins, their legitimate successors must have it, also, as long as the constitution of the Church is not changed. President Cleveland has the same prerogatives his predecessors had.

2. The Apostles wrought miracles; priests cannot work them; therefore (argue these wiseacres), priests cannot forgive sins.

What do you think of this argument? Tom can eat pumpkin pies; Jim cannot eat them; therefore, Jim can eat nothing at all? It is foolish. But your conclusion is as silly as mine. The Church of the Jews was the true Church. God, himself, had taught them so. They knew it and they felt it. Hence, they adhered to the Church stubbornly. Nothing short of a miracle could change their minds. Consequently, Christ, his Apostles, and their immediate successors had to work miracles. The Church having been firmly established, there was no necessity for miracles. In short, in the face of all history, walking as we do in the broad light of noon, it is blasphemous to ask for sledge-hammer proofs. Not so with the forgiveness of sins—it is as necessary now as in the days of the Apostles.

3. Why not confess our sins to God?—urge our non-Catholic friends.

Because God said we should confess them to his agent: "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them." Suppose, I want to send a money-order; I meet the postmaster on the street; I ask for an order; but he says: Go to the office; my deputy has charge of it—he will wait on you. Have I a right to complain? In like manner, God appointed his deputies

—to them we must go. “Brother,” said a negro to another lately, within my hearing, “God left that business in the hands of his priests.” Furthermore, is it not preposterous to call God to an account? When God speaks, we should not ask “Why?” but simply obey. However, a good reason can be given. Confession to man is a powerful restraint—a curbing of the passions. On the other hand, confessing to God would be very acceptable to the priests—it would relieve them of a great unremunerated labor.

4. *We* confess, also,—(finally retort our Protestant brethren); yes, our confession is better than yours, we confess even publicly—before the whole congregation.

Granted. But do you confess all of your sins, *i. e.*, do you particularize them? Look back and see what Saints Jerome and Chrysostom say. Tell me, have you ever heard a man confess that he committed adultery, or that he stole a mule? “No, we do not confess such things.” Well, what *do* you confess? Should a Catholic be unfortunate enough to commit these sins, he would confess them. Have you never read of a priest leading a stolen mule (or carrying its equivalent) back to the trough (or the purse) of its non-Catholic master? Do you think the owner of such a mule would argue strongly against Confession? You see, then, we must not only confess, but also make restitution.

Consequently, to recapitulate, my dear brethren, Priests could not and would not introduce Confession. The Fathers of the Church throughout all ages handed it down as an apostolical institution; and the Bible, Protestant as well as Catholic, commands it. “And many that believed, (Protestant version) came and confessed and showed their deeds.” (Acts 19:18.)

Rev. J. W. Book, of Rockport, Ind.

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**LOW SUNDAY.**

## ON THE PRESERVATION OF DIVINE GRACE IN OUR SOULS.

*“Peace be to you.” John 20: 19.*

Thus our Blessed Lord saluted his Apostles, when he appeared to them eight days after his Resurrection. He imparted to them not once but repeatedly, that incomparable blessing which the heart craves, which all men desire, but which cannot be found in terrestrial pursuits, and still less be given by the world or by what the world holds dear. “Peace be to you . . . my peace I give to you,” says our divine Saviour;—peace of heart, the peace of a good conscience, that peace enjoyed by those who, having been reconciled with God, love God sincerely, and hate sin. I trust, my dear Christians, that you have found that heavenly peace, that you have all been reconciled with God in this holy season of mercy,—that whatever sin might have been upon your consciences, making you unhappy, has been wiped away in the sacred tribunal of Penance; and that now you possess the inestimable treasure of God’s holy grace and friendship. May you never lose that precious gift, compared with which all the choicest goods of the earth are as so much dust and dirt! It is that priceless pearl of the Gospel, to obtain which, the wise merchant sold all that he possessed. You, too, have found it, my brethren; you, too, have said: “All I possess I will sacrifice, rather than again lose the grace of God by committing mortal sin!” Great, indeed, would be such a misfortune, irreparable such a calamity, fearful the consequences of such a loss! Hence, my dear Christians, since I would not have you ignorant of the danger to which you are exposed, I wish, to-day, to guard you against it, by calling your attention more especially to these two points:

*I. There is nothing more deserving your attention, or more worthy your anxious solicitude than to preserve God’s holy grace in your soul; and*

*II. What are the means to preserve that divine grace?*

I. The limits set, or the time allotted to an ordinary instruction do not permit me to even attempt to explain all the reasons which should convince us, that nothing is more deserving of our special care, nothing more worthy of our solicitude, than *Perseverance* in God’s holy friendship. The promises which, as Christians, we have made to God in Baptism; which we have repeated and renewed in the holy Sacrament of Penance, and

sealed with the adorable Flesh and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in holy Communion, demand faithfulness to God and watchfulness over ourselves, lest we might forget, in an evil moment, those solemn protestations of love, those sacred promises of fidelity to the Most High. God's infinite goodness, mercifully pardoning our sins, and receiving us again into his friendship; with the tender affection of a mother, embracing us in the Sacrament of Love and accumulating all sorts of graces upon us, condemns more forcibly than human words can express, the base ingratitude of those who abandon him.

The fearful consequences and deplorable effects which the loss of God's holy grace necessarily brings down upon the guilty soul, would be sufficient in themselves, my brethren, for a lengthy discourse. I will, therefore, passing over all this, call your attention only to one or two points, namely, what it is, in the first place, for a soul to be in God's holy friendship; and, in the second place, in what continual danger we are of losing that precious treasure. These two reasons should be more than sufficient to show us how solicitous we should be to preserve divine grace.

1. What is there in heaven, or on earth, my dear Christians, to be compared in value with sanctifying grace, by which we become and are the friends, the adopted children of God, and the heirs of his kingdom? As long as that divine grace dwells in us, we are the living temples of the most Holy Trinity. "If any one love me," says our Lord, "my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make an abode with him." (John 14: 23.) Pleasing to the eyes of the Triune God, he delights to converse with us. What happiness, what peace and joy does not this thought give to the heart of the Christian: "My God loves me,—my God is pleased with me,—he lives in me!" Can you imagine anything either in heaven above or on this miserable earth below, that is at all deserving our esteem or appreciation separated from the grace, the friendship of God? It is, forsooth, by the indwelling of this grace in our souls that the happiness and bliss of heaven, the glory of God's kingdom, the never-ending joy of the Saints, are purchased. And who possesses this inestimable prize on earth, save him who loves God and is free from mortal guilt? All the glory, riches and renown of the world, the most superbly-decorated palaces of princes and emperors, all the diamonds, pearls and precious stones of the earth, all grandeur, fame, possessions, and kingdoms, all the comforts, luxuries, and pleasures of life, are like a handful of dust, like a little puff of smoke, compared to God's holy grace in the soul. "All gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand." (Wisd. 7: 9.) As long as God by his sanctifying grace, gives life to the soul, so long man is a child of God, loved by God, an object of complacency in the eyes of God, the heir of heaven, really rich and happy in the consciousness of his heirship to the kingdom of his Father. But, no sooner has God withdrawn his friendship,

than man becomes poor, and miserable, and wretched. He may be surrounded with earthly splendor, he may be seated on a throne, with a golden sceptre in his hands and a crown of gold and gems upon his head; the world may call him happy and blest; but, alas! he serves a master under whose tyrannical sway he crouches down like a poor, unhappy slave. St. John in his Apocalypse beautifully and graphically impressed this truth upon the bishop of Laodicea. He tells him: "Thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and I have need of nothing; and thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Apoc. 3: 17.) And why, pray, does St. John speak thus? Because charity, the grace of God, did not embellish that unhappy bishop's soul. You know, and you believe this, my brethren, but do you seriously reflect on this truth? You know, that nothing on earth can be compared in value with God's grace; you know, that all else is as so much sand and dust; why, then, I ask you, do you not spurn, push away, and trample under foot whatever stands in the way, or threatens to injure that precious pearl of your soul which is so easily tarnished, and which you carry in a frail, earthen vessel? Alas! how often in the past, have you not sold that treasure for a fleeting enjoyment, for a brutal gratification, for a little empty honor, vain applause, or treacherous human respect? What would you say of a man who truly believes that he possesses a diamond of great and inestimable value, and who yet exchanges that precious jewel for a worthless trinket, seemingly bright and attractive, to be sure, but having no intrinsic value whatsoever? You would say: Poor, deluded creature, he knows not what he does. Are we not, then, in *our* turn to be pitied, if we deliberately exchange God's grace and friendship for what the Holy Ghost calls "a little sand"? I hope, however, better things of you; and trust that you are more than ever resolved to withstand the allurements of sin, and avoid those dangers which on all sides threaten to deprive you of the treasure of divine grace.

2. As it is not enough to know and even appreciate the precious gift received when we are reconciled with God, if we are not, also, well aware of the many and constant risks to which we are exposed of being deprived of that gift, I will merely point out to you those dangers, in order that you may not be tempted to rely too much on your own strength and your good resolutions, which, indeed, of itself, would be one of the most deceitful of dangers. Remember, beloved Christians, that within your hearts even after conversion, you retain the same passions and inordinate inclinations, which once occasioned your fall; and that those evil tendencies of concupiscence, (perhaps, made stronger by former habits), will almost insensibly cause you in time to forget your good resolutions, and lead you again into sin, unless you watch and stand upon your guard. Remember that those vivid impressions which caused you to repent; those pious affections which you

experienced when fed and nourished with the Bread of Angels in holy Communion, will not always be experienced. And in the absence of these sensible and encouraging affections, the natural proclivity to evil is apt to lead you astray, especially when, at the same time, the dangers from without press sorely upon you. Satan, jealous of your happiness, far from being unconcerned because you have left his service, will renew with greater vigor his attacks upon your soul. Mindful of his success in the past, he will again resort to the same means to ensnare you. And should he fail at first, he will, if needs be, take seven devils with him, and forcing an entrance into your soul, take full possession of it. The world will again by flattery, human respect, sinful amusements and its thousand deceitful allurements, endeavor to entrap you. Thus, the three great enemies of your soul will unite in seeking its ruin, and unless your vigilance increases as the danger becomes more alarming, you may rest assured that, almost before you are aware of it, you shall have fallen back into your former unfortunate and deplorable condition. How many of you here present, my brethren, have to acknowledge that in past years you have lost that precious jewel of divine grace because you neglected to watch diligently over your priceless treasure! Beware, lest the same misfortune befall you again; for, know it well, that should you be so ungrateful as to again yield to the enemy after so many protestations of fidelity and love for God, after receiving so many and extraordinary blessings and favors, it is very uncertain whether or not you shall ever again receive the grace to repent. God is just, as well as good and merciful. And what do you say yourselves? Would you not deserve the severest punishments at the hands of a just God, should you again sell his friendship for "a little sand"? You reply with fervor: "No, no, never again, will we make such an exchange! But, since the allied enemies are so powerful, the dangers so numerous and treacherous, tell us, we pray you, what means shall we use to render ourselves secure against their assaults?"

II. This appeal, my dear Christians, I intend to answer by calling your attention to the means which you must employ for your defence. Time not permitting me, to-day, to develop all the means you must make use of in order to remain faithful, I will only point out some of the most essential ones.

I. He who is truly converted and sincere in his desire to preserve the grace of God, must, in order to stand firm against the enemies of his soul, the devil, the world, and the flesh, be thoroughly convinced of his own weakness and inability to succeed in the battle, and have unlimited confidence in the strength from above. Presumption, or too much reliance on our own strength, is sure to precipitate us into the abyss of our former bad habits and sinful vices. To think, that because we are now resolved

to avoid sin and not to yield to our passions (of whatever nature they may be), we are privileged to go into the occasions which have led us to sin before, is the surest way to destruction. Behold St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles! Was ever a man more determined to be loyal and faithful to his divine Master? "Lord," he exclaims with fervor: "though all should leave thee, yet, will *I* not! I am prepared to go through danger unto death with thee and for thee!" And yet, we all know how lamentably he fell! On the other hand, my dear Christians, we must put our trust and confidence in God and fear not the dangers which we cannot avoid,—for God is faithful and, (as Faith teaches), he will not permit any one to be tempted above his strength.

2. As a second means to persevere in the grace of God, I suggest to you frequent consideration or reflection on the truths taught by our holy religion. What was it that moved you to repent? What is it that now animates you with that sincere determination to walk in the path of virtue? Assuredly, nothing else but those heavenly truths revealed by God. When Satan, roaring like a lion, and seeking whom he may devour, shall in the stillness of night disturb your mind, your imagination;—or, like a thief in the night, shall steal upon you, striving to induce you to yield to his evil suggestions, think, *then*, of the all-seeing eye of a just God who will bring to light what has been committed in the darkness. When the world with its vanities, honors, and riches like a brilliant soap-bubble or a cloud of rose-tinted smoke, will almost blind the eyes of your soul, so that you can scarcely see what is really for your eternal good,—let the words of Jesus Christ be remembered: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16: 26.) If adversities and trials become to you a source of danger, strengthen yourselves by the thought of a heavenly reward, for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; and the violent bear it away." (Matt. 11: 12.) Should the struggle prove fierce and long, my brethren, let us attend in the depths of our souls to the infallible word of the Man-God: "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved." (Matt. 10: 22.)

3. Yet, unless you use the sword, like good soldiers on the battlefield, at all times prepared to meet the enemy, you shall not remain faithful. By the sword I mean prayer, daily, fervent, and constant prayer. To this powerful weapon our Lord has promised the victory, when he said: "Ask and it shall be given you." (Matt. 7: 7.) If, indeed, you are convinced of your weakness, and at the same time in earnest to save your soul, why, then, it follows as a necessary consequence, that you should ask the God of strength to help you put your enemies to flight, and not suffer you to be seriously wounded in the deadly conflict.

4. Finally, my dear Christians, add to all these means, the frequentation of the holy Sacraments. Wait not until you have received a deadly wound, or until you have actually taken the fatal poison, before going to the physician of the soul. Which of you would be so regardless of the interests of his body, as to put off applying the remedies that would prevent a fatal disease, until the malady is actually upon him, and the body in such a dangerous condition that life cannot be saved. And what is the health of the body compared to that of the soul? Apply to the anointed physician of Christ to know what remedies to employ in order to prevent the dangerous, perhaps mortal malady, from returning upon your soul. And, oh! if you find that already you are growing weaker, that you have lost your relish for prayer, that again you begin to feel inclined to yield to the insidious promptings of your passions which you had so firmly resolved to resist,—then, I beseech you in the Lord, delay not your approach to the Sacraments. Lay open the ailing condition of your soul to the representative of Jesus Christ, and he, like a true physician, will tell you to be strengthened by the living waters,—nay, more, to be nourished with the precious Body and Blood of our Lord in the holy Eucharist. This holy food, you know it well, my brethren, feeds and nourishes the soul, even as meat and bread nourish the body. The body languishes, faints away, if not sustained by food and nourishment; even so does the soul become weak and unable to carry its burden, unable to withstand the attacks of its enemies, if not strengthened by the Bread of Angels in the Holy Eucharist. Again, then, I say, if you wish to persevere and preserve God's holy grace within your hearts, approach the holy Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist frequently and with due preparation.

In conclusion, my beloved Christians, I say to you once more with all my heart: "Peace be to you." There can be no peace for those who love not God. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord." (Is. 48: 22.) To preserve that peace, that inestimable treasure, you must watch over yourselves diligently. Your enemies are jealous, they will conspire against you to deprive you of the peace of God by robbing your souls of its fairest ornament, the snow-white pearl of sanctifying grace. I have endeavored to explain to you the incomparable value of that precious pearl, and I trust you have resolved, to-day, sooner to give up everything than expose yourselves in the future to the loss of that treasure. If it were required of you to have your bodies torn to pieces, or burnt alive, or thrown before wild beasts to be devoured, with the holy martyrs of old, you must be ready to sacrifice all, to suffer all, before you willingly permit your souls to be deprived again of God's holy grace. Neither riches nor fame, honor or renown, comfort or pleasure shall ever again be compared with this treasure, far less exchanged for what is naught (as the Holy Ghost hath said): but "a little sand," a handful of dust. Such being your dispositions, my dear brethren, you may say with St. Paul, relying not on your own

power, but on help from above: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8: 38, 39.) Amen.

Rev. L. BAX.

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## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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### THE LOVE WHICH CASTETH OUT FEAR.

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep."* John 10: 11.

Of all the terrors and risks attendant upon the moment of our final dissolution, the most frightful, my dear brethren, is the danger of dying a bad death. If we die well, we shall be happy forever with God; if we die ill, on the contrary, eternal misery will be our inevitable doom. But whether we shall ultimately make a happy or an unhappy end, 'alas! we do not know; God only knows. How can a man, who has reason and faith, revolving these thoughts in his mind, fail to approach death with fear and trembling! But it is not my intention on this occasion to increase this salutary fear in you, my dearly beloved; but rather to moderate the fright and terror with which the consideration of our last end and its attendant risks, must naturally inspire a believing soul. In the Gospel of this day, we find the Saviour of the world comparing himself to a good shepherd: "I am," says he, "the good shepherd!" Yes, my brethren, he is, indeed, a good shepherd who loves his flock tenderly, sincerely, and disinterestedly; he is a devoted shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, rather than give them over to the teeth of the ravenous wolf. This, alone, dear Christians, is a motive, sufficient to make us put our trust and confidence in him; he is good and merciful; let us, therefore, hope that he will not suffer us to make an unhappy end. It is true, that our manifold offences, and those fierce assaults of the devil whereby he lays siege to the souls of the dying, are sufficient of themselves to make us tremble; but since God loves us with tenderness, constancy, and sincerity, our hope should always be greater than our fear. Pious, yet timid, hearts, it is to you I am speaking this day; it is to you who have made your Easter Confession and Communion; to you, who live in obedience to the laws of holy Mother Church, that I especially address my discourse of this Sunday. And what have I to say to you? I will endeavor to make clear to you that the great love Almighty God bears you, should preserve you from an undue and hurtful

fear of an unhappy end. You, my dear faithful Christians, have all reason to hope for a happy death, because

- I. God loves you sincerely;*
- II. God loves you constantly; and*
- III. God loves you tenderly.*

*I. God loves you sincerely;* therefore, you may hope to die well. The love of God differs greatly from the love of man. Sincere love is a scarce article in this world of deceit and self-seeking; hence, the love of man for his fellow-men is generally nothing else but apparent love, or self-love. Men often pretend to love, when they do not love at all; or if they *do* love, they love only for their own gratification, or as long as some real or fancied advantage may be gained. Herein, divine love differs from human love. Being holy, God loves without disguise; and being independent, he loves disinterestedly. At what time are we necessary to God, so that he must needs love us, for his own profit or advantage? Can we do him any injury, (considered in his perfect and impassible Essence,) when we rebel against him? “If thou sin, what shalt thou hurt him?” (Job 35: 6.) Or will it be of any use to him in his intrinsic glory, if we spend ourselves entirely in his service? No, my brethren, decidedly no! for the Scripture says: “What doth it profit God if thou be just?” (Job 22: 3.) He is the centre of all happiness; the ocean of all perfections; the source of all good. He can enrich our poverty with his treasures, but our poverty can add nothing to his riches. “God is not served by the hands of men, as though he needed any thing, seeing it is he who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” (Acts 17: 25.)

If we turn our eyes from God to ourselves, the sincerity of God’s love for us will be manifested still more conspicuously. Do we deserve, my brethren, to be loved by God? If we contemplate our interior without flattering ourselves, far from finding anything there which might induce him to love us, we will certainly discover a thousand reasons to be despised and hated by him. Being frail creatures composed of flesh and spirit, what is there in us, that could be the object of his complacency? Our body is made of dust, and is tending constantly to corruption and decay; are dust, corruption, and decay, objects capable of drawing to themselves the pure affections of the divine Heart! It is true, dear Christians, our soul is made to God’s image and likeness,—but how often and how miserably is this likeness defiled and disfigured by sin? How great is man’s ignorance, weakness, malice, and inconstancy! The spirit and the flesh are always contradicting each other, always waging a perpetual war against each other, agreeing, alas! in nothing else, but the commission of sin. What, then, can there be in us, (I ask,) that could please God?

And if there be anything in us *now*, that is pleasing to God, there was certainly nothing in us before we were created; yet he loved us before we had an existence, assuring us by the prophet Jeremiah, that “he hath loved us with an *everlasting* love.” (Jer. 31: 3.) There was no heaven yet, in that far-off period of God’s eternity when he dwelt with himself alone, and creatures were not; yet, even then, he had decreed to create a heaven for us. All was chaos and darkness, and the world was not made, yet, even then, God had destined for us the creation of this beautiful universe. We were buried, then, my brethren, in the abyss of our original nothingness, yet God had already decreed to draw us from that primitive nonentity, and to give us the being we now enjoy. He has loved us with an everlasting love. He has known us from eternity, he has preserved us for this century of enlightenment, and, above all, beloved, he has made us members of his one true, saving, Catholic Church! He has loved us with an everlasting love. But, after he has drawn us out of nothing, does he leave us to ourselves? Ah! no, he assists us in every danger and difficulty and doubtful affair; he gives us all the means necessary to make a holy and a happy end. Can there be a more sincere, more disinterested love? Since God, my dear Christians, has bestowed so many graces and benefits upon us, have we not all reason to hope that he will also give us the grace to depart this life in his love and favor? Can we have so little faith as to fear he would fail to assist us with his grace, at the very moment when we most stand in need of it? We are his creatures, whom his love has conceived, whom his love has made, whom his love has preserved to this very day; how, then, can we fear that he would deliver us to his and our greatest enemies in the hour of danger? Oh no, my brethren! he cannot do this, as long as he does not cease to be a good and merciful God. But, my brethren, do not believe that, in order to console you, I say too much. No, I do not exaggerate. I would say too much, if I were addressing certain unhappy souls who, being ungrateful to their divine Creator and Redeemer, continually despise his love and offend his majesty! I know that such sinners have little reason to hope for a good death, since, by the abuse of God’s graces, they constantly provoke his anger and indignation; but as I have said in the beginning, I am speaking to pious, just, and timorous souls. I do not say too much, when I say that they must have good courage; and that our merciful God, who loves them sincerely, will give them no less proofs of his love in death, than he has given them during life.

Be consoled, therefore, O ye just souls, and whilst you remind yourselves that you are the work of that God who infinitely loves what he has made, approach him with humble confidence, and say to him with Job: “To the work of thy hands thou shall reach out thy right hand.” (Job 14: 15.) “Lord, thou hast drawn me out of nothing; thou hast blessed my beginning, and it is in thy power to bless my end. Lord, I put my entire confidence in thy love, because I know, that he, whom thou lovest

shall not be forsaken." And shall we not have courage to speak thus to God, my dearest brethren, when the love with which he loves us, is as sincere as that with which he loves his only begotten Son? Let us, therefore, put our trust in him, let us hope that, as he assists us with his divine grace to lead a pious life, he will also enable us to make a happy and holy end.

II. The *constancy* with which God loves us, inspires us afresh with this consoling hope. He enriches our poverty, he supports our weakness, he consoles us in afflictions, he hears our supplications; and, encouraging us to live always at peace with him, he even makes use of his justice to manifest his love for us. He has treasures of grace, of which we are allowed to partake at will; he has an eternal kingdom of delights, and he promises us the possession of it. In short, the zeal with which God loves us, is so great that he continues to love us, even when we strive to resist his holy love. Yes, sinners, you exert all the means in your power to prevent him from loving you; you abuse his goodness, you wear out his patience. He is your Creator, and you revolt against him; he is your Law-giver, and you break his commandments; he is your Lord, and you neglect his service; you are so ungrateful, so disobedient, so malicious, that it seems, at times, as if you would compel him to hate and despise you, to destroy and annihilate you from the face of the earth. Indeed, you would not deserve to be pitied,—you could throw the blame on no one but on yourselves,—if he should punish you, then, according to the rigor of his justice; but he is so gracious and merciful, that he even loves those who resist him. , He hates sin, (and we cannot imagine it possible for him not to hate it,) nevertheless, he does not cease to love the sinner.

Pious souls, if God's love for us is thus so great, that he employs all his divine perfections for our welfare and interest,—if it is so constant and devoted that even the most heinous sins and crimes may not avail to turn his divine Heart away from us, do you not do wrong to fear that he would refuse you the grace to conclude your days in his favor? But why are you so diffident and downcast? You say: "Because of my sins!" But have you not bewailed your sins with tears of sorrow? Have you not detested them, again and again, in the past, and are you not sorry for them at the present time? Have you not made the firm resolution rather to die than to offend God any more? If so, why are you afraid? Can you doubt that the adorable Heart which loves you so much, has accepted your tears and repentance? Perhaps some pious souls will say: "But the number of my sins is very great." Hear what St. Augustine says in reply: "Have you been as wicked as God is merciful?" No, my brethren, he only must despair who has committed more sins than God can forgive. Even if you are ready to say that you have committed the most heinous of all crimes; yet will I assure you that if your sins were ten times more heinous and

more abominable than they are, God is able to pardon them all. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool." (Is. 1: 18.) There is no sin too abominable and enormous that penitential tears cannot efface. You will say: "I believe all that, but then, Father, there are the many scandals I have given." But have you given as many scandals, pray, as did Mary Magdalene, Pelagia, Margaret of Cortona, or Mary of Egypt? Yet *they*, my brethren, have made a holy and a happy end, because they were converted in time. Again, if God had intended to punish your crimes by an unhappy death, was it not in his power to cut the thread of your life, when you raged against your enemies, when you were guilty of so many other great sins against him? He has not done it; on the contrary, he has prolonged your life up to the present day; he has given you courage to confess your sins, and yet you fear he might, after you have done penance, permit you to fall into that very punishment from which he so mercifully preserved you whilst you were still impenitent? Ah, no! dear Christians, God gives you manifest proofs of his love, he gives you to understand that he will not permit you to die unhappily! But, my brethren, I counsel you, above all things, be faithful to him for the future. Never cease to repent of your sins and to love God, in your little measure, as much as he loves you; and if, at the recollection of your former transgressions, the fear of an unhappy death afflicts you, say with courage and confidence: "I know that God loves me; I know that he desires not the death of the sinner. My sins are numberless, I cannot deny it, but God loves me; my sins are great, I will not excuse them, but still God loves me; I have deserved by my sins to be precipitated into hell, but since God loves me, I confidently hope to obtain life everlasting!"

III. The tenderness with which God loves us, leads us to expect a good death. He is the Physician who cares for our salvation, and who desires nothing more ardently than to free our souls from all their diseases. He is the Shepherd who watches over his flock with the greatest vigilance and devotion. How good is he not to those who endeavor to serve him! Does he not give them peace of mind and great interior consolations? Does he not say that it is his delight to be with the children of men? But he, also, shows the tenderness of his love to those who turn their back upon him. What promises, what artifices, does he not make use of in order to recall them from their evil ways! With what solicitude does he not seek after his lost ones, as if he could not be content, if the sinner were not living in peace with him; and when that Good Shepherd has found the lost sheep, does he not experience an inexpressible joy?

But nothing reveals to us more fully the tenderness of the divine Heart than the gift of his only begotten Son, which God has bestowed upon us; of that Son who is the likeness of his essence, the Word of his understand-

ing, the splendor of his majesty, and the object of his complacency! “God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son!” (John 3: 16.) Having compassion for the results of our sinful excesses, he gave him to us as our Physician; having compassion for our darkness and ignorance, he gave him to us as our Teacher; having compassion for our miserable and most degrading servitude, he gave him to us as our Redeemer; “God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son;” (John 3: 16,) and when he gave him to us, urged and pressed by that passionate love, what humiliations did he not permit him to suffer in his Incarnation, what poverty at his birth, what troubles and afflictions during his life, and, O my brethren, what reproaches, insults, and mockery, what pains and agony in his death! And if *this* is not tender love, what else is it? Did you ever hear that a father sacrificed his only and dearly beloved son, to save the life of his servant? Yet, God has done this for us, his poor servants; for “God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting.” (John 3: 16.)

After that, all ye pious souls, will you not give up the fear of a bad and unhappy death? For what end has God given you such great and strong proofs of his tender love, if not for this,—that you should be assured of a holy death; that you should be convinced that “whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting?” He says, my dear brethren, in the Gospel of this day, that he is not of the number of those shepherds who forsake their sheep when the wolf comes, but that he, the Good Shepherd of our souls, is prepared to give the greatest proofs of his love towards them in the hour of their greatest danger. And does he not hereby permit us to understand that he protects his elect in the most dangerous time of all, which is the hour of death? Who can doubt this? God consoles the just man upon his dying bed; he gives him his grace to make a holy and a happy end; he arms him with faith, hope, and charity, to fight the last fight; and he shows him, even in his agony, the glorious crown of victory. Hence, I say to you as Christ said to his Apostles: “Fear not, little flock; (fear not, all ye fearful souls); for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom.” (Luke 12: 32.) That good God who loves you so sincerely, so unwaveringly, so tenderly, that good and merciful God has prepared a kingdom for you, and, in his own good time, he will place you in possession of it: “it has pleased your Father to give you a kingdom.” And since death is the gate to that kingdom, do not be afraid of dying. Life is a journey, my brethren, towards that golden gate, and God awaits you at the end of it. And because he, the Good Shepherd, awaits you at the end of your journey, you may be assured that he will not forsake you during your passage through this vale of tears, but will enable you to arrive safely at his kingdom where, as the adopted brethren of his Son and Heir, our Lord Jesus Christ, you may hope to reign with him in glory forevermore. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## DUTIES OF PARENTS.

*“I am the good shepherd.” John 10: 11.*

Under the symbol of a good shepherd, Jesus presents himself, my beloved brethren, as the model of all those to whom divine Providence has given charge over others. Every superior, having a lawful right to command others, is in a moral sense, their shepherd. The foremost among such are, of course, parents. As Jesus was the Good Shepherd of his own beloved flock, so parents should be the good shepherds of their children. There is nothing more to be desired, than that parents should clearly understand and faithfully fulfil the important duties which God has intrusted to them. The ignorance and neglect of parents, my dear Christians, cause the greater part of the evils we see in the world, and which result in the eternal loss of innumerable souls. To parents, God has committed a most precious charge, namely, the spiritual and temporal care of those little ones, whom he has created to his own image, whom he loves with the tenderest love, and for whose salvation he has shed the last drop of his most sacred blood. And for what purpose has he confided to them these children whom he loves so dearly? That they may nourish and support them in their infancy and childhood; guard them in their youth from evil, whether of soul or body; and train them up in virtue and piety. Hence, parents are bound to *provide for their children, to instruct and correct them, and to give them a good Catholic education.* On the day of judgment, my brethren, Almighty God will demand of parents a strict account of these duties.

If they have discharged them faithfully, their reward will be exceedingly great; but if they have neglected them, their punishment will be most severe; for their children will bear witness against them, and God will condemn those negligent parents as guilty of the spiritual murder of their offspring. The duties which parents owe to their children may be considered, my dearly beloved, as concerning

- I. *Their bodies, in other words, their natural life and well-being here below; and*
- II. *Their souls, or the important interests of their eternal salvation.*

I. I will then speak to you, to-day, dear parents, first of those duties which regard the temporal interests of your children. *Parents are bound*

*to watch over the safety and preservation of their children, to provide them with food and clothing, to supply their necessary wants as long as they are unable to take care of themselves, or to work for their own subsistence.* The father must provide for their support by his labor and industry; the mother must nurse, feed, and clothe them, tend them in sickness, and guard them by continual watchfulness from those dangers and accidents to which helpless little ones are often exposed. If the father, through his own neglect, leaves his family without the means of support, spending his time in idleness, or wasting, and squandering his earnings in saloons, he is guilty of mortal sin. If, on the other hand, the mother allows her children to run uncared for in the streets, exposes them by her negligence to the danger of being scalded or burned alive, while she, perhaps, is gadding about or gossiping with her neighbors; or if, through her own fault, she leaves them in rags, or without proper nourishment, she, also, is grievously guilty in the sight of God.

In olden times when schools were scarce, parents were the only teachers of their children. Although, with the help of God we are now able to maintain our own schools, to which, I trust, you send your children regularly, parents are still the principal teachers of their children. "You are obliged," says St. Augustine, "to give instruction in your houses, as the bishop in our churches. You are the apostles of your children, your house is your church; and if we priests are bound to guard their souls and give an account of them, how much more you, O parents, to whom their education is particularly confided, and under whose roof God has placed them from the beginning of their life?" It is your duty to send your children to school, and to provide them with such instructions as are suited to their position in life. Even the poorest should take care that their children are taught to read and write. Parents who neglect their duty, and allow their children to grow up in ignorance, or those who fulfil that duty imperfectly, by sending them irregularly to school, and keeping them at home on the slightest pretext, offend God and do their children a serious injury, inasmuch as they deprive them of that knowledge which is of great importance for their future advancement in life. A good parent will always be most anxious to second the efforts of the teacher. He will take care that his children attend school regularly, and at the appointed hours; also, that they learn at home the tasks that are set them, and finally, he will keep them at school till they have finished their education. How often does it not happen that children are taken away from school at a very early age for the sake of the trifling wages they are able to earn, and are thus deprived of instruction at the very time when they are most capable of profiting by it! The loss which they suffer is one which will be deeply felt by them in time, and which can hardly be supplied in later life.

Finally, parents are bound, as far as they are able, to provide their children when they grow older with the means of obtaining a livelihood.

You owe this to the honor of God and the welfare of your children. Children not accustomed to work<sup>8</sup> from their childhood, turn out bad Christians as Scripture and experience teach. They become habituated to an idle life, to which they cling also in their adult age. It is a proverb of the Inspired Writer: "A young man according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it." Again: "Idleness hath taught much evil." Accordingly, my dear brethren, children who are not taught to work, and whose education is neglected, often become rakes and profligates, and, in their turn, unworthy and unprofitable fathers and mothers. As soon as children have received the necessary education at school, they should be apprenticed to a trade, or some suitable employment should be procured for them. In this, parents should not look exclusively to what will bring them the highest wages for the time, but to what will be of the most lasting advantage to their offspring; they should, moreover, take care that the employment which they procure for their children is one which does not interfere with the practice of their religion, or expose them to any danger of sin.

II. I come now, my dearly beloved, to speak of the obligations of parents regarding the immortal souls of their children. These obligations are, of course, far higher and more important than those which simply regard their temporal interests.

1. In the first place, parents are bound to see that their children are baptized soon after their birth; indeed, if possible, within the first few days thereafter. Without Baptism, no one can enter heaven. We are all born "children of wrath," as you well know, my brethren,—all conceived and born in the sin of Adam, and nothing defiled can enjoy the sight of God. Those parents, therefore, who delay the baptism of their children for any length of time without strict necessity, are guilty of a grievous offence, since they thereby expose their children to the danger of dying in a state of sin, and of being forever excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Parents cannot be too particular on this point, for new-born infants are liable at any moment, to be carried off by spasms, convulsions, and many other sudden diseases; and, indeed, a very large proportion of them die in the first few months of their existence.

2. Parents are bound to instruct their children in the great truths of religion and their daily prayers. As soon as their children are able to lisp, they should teach them to pronounce with reverence the holy names of Jesus and Mary, and to sign themselves with the sign of the cross. They should often speak to them of that good God who made them, who watches over them with the tenderest love, and who gives them by the hands of their parents, food, clothing, and all that is necessary for their

daily wants. They should try to inspire them with a lively horror of sin, and with the love of truth, purity, and every other virtue. They should set before them the example of the child Jesus, who, though the great God of heaven, was submissive and obedient to his own creatures—Mary and Joseph. *Parents are also bound to teach their children their prayers, and see that they say them regularly, morning and evening.* As their children grow older, they must exact of them that they hear Mass upon Sundays and holydays; also, that they attend Sunday School and Catechism, in order that they may be instructed under the care of the priest, and prepared at a proper age for their first confession and holy Communion. Nor must parents think that they have done all that is necessary when their children have been admitted to their first Communion. They must do their utmost to help and preserve the grace of that adorable Sacrament in their young hearts, by making them attend catechetical instructions, sending them regularly to their duties, and seeing that they are in due time prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation. O, how happy are those children whose parents fully understand and faithfully discharge these important duties!

3. In the third place, my dear brethren, parents are bound to *correct* their children when they do wrong, either by warning and reproofing, or, if necessary, by punishing them. Those parents who never scold their children for their faults nor chastise them when they deserve it, far from being good and kind to them, are, on the contrary, their worst enemies; for if children's passions are not checked, and their faults not corrected whilst they are young, they will be the cause of much misery to themselves and others in this life, and, perhaps, result in their eternal damnation in the next. 'Hence, the holy Scripture says: "He that spareth the rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him, correcteth him betimes." (Prov. 13: 24.) What, indeed, can be more injurious than the foolish indulgence of those weak parents who give way to all the whims and fancies of their children, and can never bear to reprove or punish them? No wonder that their children grow up wayward, unruly, and stubborn, causing many a bitter hour and secret tear to their parents *in* after life, according to the words of the Wise Man: "Bow down his neck while he is young, and beat his side while he is a child, lest he grow stubborn and regard thee not, and so be a sorrow of heart to thee." (Eccles. 30: 12.) And again: "The rod and the reproof give wisdom, but the child that is left to his own will bringeth his mother to shame." (Prov. 29: 15.) *On the contrary, some parents err through over-severity*, or by punishing in anger or passion. Slight faults should be corrected with slight punishments,—a look or a word of reproof will often be enough; but serious faults against the commandments of God should be punished more severely, only with calmness and prudence, so that the little offender may see that the correction is not inflicted through passion or revenge, but through a true love for him and

an earnest desire for his good. Parents should not punish their children unreasonably, but only after their admonitions and reprimands have been in vain; neither should they assault them in the heat of passion, like blind and furious beasts. Their chastisement should be proportionate to the fault. St. Chrysostom says: "Unless you moderate the punishment, or observe some proportion between the punishment and the offence, you will implant far greater vices in your children's hearts than those which you intend to uproot." The punishment should be allotted with impartiality. You must never let pass unpunished in one child, faults for which you chastise another. The spoiled child is not made better in this way, and the others are provoked to indignation: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger," (Ephes. 6: 4,) lest they be discouraged. Parents, making one of their children a "pet child", introduce into their households a continual source of jealousies and heart-burnings which endanger the family peace.

4. The fourth duty which parents owe to their children is *to watch over them and guard them as far as possible from all danger of sin.* The greatest danger to which children can be exposed is that of bad company. Nothing has more influence over the young than example; and innocent children are soon corrupted by wicked companions. Parents, therefore, are strictly bound to watch over their children in this respect, and to allow them to play with those only whose conduct they know to be irreproachable and virtuous. They should not permit their children without necessity to be out after dark, except in their own company; and should carefully keep them from all sinful and dangerous amusements. Even at home, my dear brethren, they must continue to exercise a prudent watch over their conduct in order that they may not be exposed to any danger of evil. A special and most vigilant care should be exercised over the books and newspapers of the household. If their children are able to read, they should never allow them to waste their time in perusing those foolish novels, those corrupt journals, those passionate love-romances, which only serve to weaken the mind and inflame the passions; but should provide them as far as they are able with books that are both innocent and instructive. This is a point of vital importance in these days of cheap, wide-spread, and most debasing literature. Parents should look well to it, and inquire at once into the reading-matter of their children. Finally, they should never forget that our nature is corrupt through the sin of our first parents, and that, however good or innocent their children may appear, they are still prone to evil, and as soon as they come to the use of reason are exposed to the temptation of the devil, who will leave nothing untried to rob them of the precious treasure of their innocence.

5. *Example* is a natural language, which unconsciously persuades and imperceptibly penetrates the youthful soul, tending to form in it good or

bad habits; and this more especially when that language is spoken by superiors or by persons with whom they daily associate. Children are very close observers of human nature; little eyes are sharp and overcurious, and little memories remember many things of which their elders reck not; tiny prattling witnesses imitate whatever they perceive in their parents, and often retain the impressions thereof to their old age. Hence, parents are bound to set their children a good example. O, how grievous in the sight of God is the conduct of those wicked parents who curse and swear, who get drunk, who quarrel and fight even in the presence of their children; who stay away from Mass, neglect the Sacraments, or break the days of fasting and abstinence, thereby destroying by their own wicked example the effect of all that their children may have learned at Church or Catechism! If, as our Blessed Lord says, he that scandalizes any one of his little ones had better have been cast, with a millstone about his neck, into the depths of the sea, what, my brethren, will be the punishment of those wicked parents who, by their bad example, are the spiritual murderers of their own children? A good parent, on the contrary, will teach his children by his own example to love virtue, and fulfil faithfully the duties of religion. His children will learn from him to be attentive to their prayers and their Sunday's Mass; regular in frequenting the Sacraments, truthful in word, upright in their dealings, masters of their own temper, tender of their neighbor's character, charitable to the poor,—in a word, faithful in the discharge of all their duties to God, their neighbors, and their own souls. Trained when young in the way in which they should walk, by the powerful influence of their good parents' example, they will not depart from the right way when they grow old; but will leave, in turn, to their own children the same pattern of Christian virtue, which they have received as a most precious inheritance from their parents. Unless fathers and mothers thus strive to edify their children by acts of true piety, their admonitions are in vain, their threatenings and punishments are in vain. Their admonitions will be in vain, since their children will say to them, if not in word, at least in thought: “‘Physician, heal thyself’, ‘Cast first the beam out of thine own eye’.” (Luke 6: 42.) Esop presents this truth in the fable of the old lobster who bade his young go forward instead of backward. They tried to obey, but noting that the old lobster himself continued to go backward as he had always done, they cried out to him, very naturally: “‘Father, show us how to do it, and we will follow thee!’” The threatenings and punishments of disedifying parents are also in vain. They will implant in their children's hearts neither love of virtue nor horror of sin; on the contrary, vice will strike deeper root in that virgin soil, because it is nourished by the guilty example of lawful superiors. O, that all children could say of their parents what St. Augustine said of his mother, Monica: “‘She has supported her admonitions not only by tears, but also by her own example.’”

Finally, parents are bound to *pray for their children*, in order to draw

upon them the blessing of God, for as David says: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." (Ps. 126: 1.) We read that Job offered sacrifices for his sons and daughters lest perhaps they had sinned. So should parents pray for divine blessings upon their children, as well in their daily prayers, as also when they hear Mass and approach the Holy Communion. What they are not able to do by their own words and advice, they may often succeed in effecting by their humble, persevering prayers, for God gives a special blessing to the petitions which parents offer in behalf of their children.

Be, then, my beloved Christian parents, the good shepherds of your children by instruction, discipline, and good example. You owe this to their welfare, to the welfare of the Church and society, and to the salvation of your own souls. And if, by your care, your vigilance, your fervent prayers and sacrifices, the immortal souls committed to your guardianship, preserve their innocence and advance in the path of virtue, crowning their holy lives by the choicest graces of a happy death, your children shall shine as priceless jewels in the diadem of your heavenly glory; and you and they shall hear at last with delight the greeting of the Good Shepherd: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" (Matt. 25: 21.)

Rev. HENRY GIBSON.

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## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY GHOST IN THE CHURCH AND IN EACH INDIVIDUAL SOUL.

*“A little while, and you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me; because I go to the Father.”*

*John 16: 16.*

The Gospel of this day, my beloved brethren, is a portion of that farewell discourse which Christ made to his disciples after his last Supper, immediately before he entered upon his sacred Passion. He announced to them that the hour of his departure had at length arrived: “A little while, and you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me; because I go to the Father.” The time had, indeed, come when the Apostles saw their divine Master only “a little while”; for, on the day which followed that last solemn Supper, he died upon the cross. Then “again, a little while,” and they saw him; for on the third day, he rose from the dead and appeared in their midst. Forty days after his glorious Resurrection, he ascended into heaven, and they saw him no more; but, a few years having passed, he called and took them to himself into heaven, where they enjoy the Beatific Vision for all eternity.

We may all, in our turn, my brethren, address these words to one another: “A little while, and you shall not see me.” What is our life upon earth but a little while which swiftly passes away? After a little while, after a few years,—perhaps, after a few days, we must quit this perishable world, and our friends and acquaintances shall see us no more. Again, a little while, and they shall see us; for those whom we leave behind shall soon follow us, and find us in the house of our eternity. Let us, then, not set our heart and affections upon this temporal, evanescent life; much less upon its still more fleeting joys and goods; on the contrary, let us devote this little while of our present existence to the service of God and the salvation of our souls, that at the end of our earthly pilgrimage we may be able to say with our blessed Lord and Saviour: “I go to the Father.” We can obtain that object of our desires, eternal salvation; for the Holy Ghost whom Christ promised and sent down upon us from heaven, gives us the necessary grace to work out our salvation and secure our immortal reward. Of this consoling truth I shall speak to you, to-day, dear Christians, by answering the two following questions:

- I. *What graces does the Holy Ghost impart to the Church?* and
- II. *What graces does the Holy Ghost impart to each individual soul?*

I. The Holy Ghost *teaches, sanctifies, and governs* the Church to the end of time.

1. If the Church of God was to perform her task, to preserve the doctrine received from Christ pure and unadulterated, and to preach it to all nations, she needed a divine Teacher. And, behold, our Blessed Lord promised her this divine Teacher in the person of the Holy Ghost, when he said: "The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you." (John 14: 26.) Christ being ascended into heaven, the Holy Ghost holds his place, teaching his Church all truth, and bringing to her mind all things whatsoever Christ had revealed, enlightening her so that she may in all cases distinguish error from truth, and define the true doctrine of Christ; in short, my brethren, making her the infallible teacher of mankind. And because the Church has been empowered to receive the people of all times into her pale, and for this reason must exist to the consummation of the world, the Holy Ghost continues to abide with her throughout all centuries, even unto the end of time. Hence, our Saviour says: "And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth." (John 14: 16, 17.)

This is a great consolation for us, beloved Christians, for we know with certainty, that we have the true faith, since the Church proposes nothing to be believed, except what the Holy Ghost inspires her to teach. Therefore, do not suffer yourselves to be deluded by the enemies of the Church, whose name and number are legion. Let them revile our holy Mother, the Church, and denounce her doctrine as superstition and idolatry; pay no attention to their howling; it is not a good spirit that speaks through them, but the spirit of falsehood, the spirit of the Father of lies, who has assailed truth and virtue from the beginning. Remain loyal to the Church, and adhere to what she tells you through her ministers, in the pulpit and in the confessional. The time will come when being stretched, like St. Teresa, on your deathbed, nothing will comfort you more than the thought to which that great saint gave expression in her dying moments: "I have always been a good, obedient child of the Church. I have always believed in her teachings, and faithfully fulfilled her commands."

2. But what should induce you still more to always remain good children of the Church, dear brethren, is that the Holy Ghost not only teaches but also *sanctifies* her. "What the soul is to the body of man, the Holy Ghost is to the body of Christ, the Church; what the soul does for all the members of the body, the Holy Ghost does for the whole Church."

(St. Aug.) Now, we all know that the soul gives and preserves the natural life in the body; in like manner, the Holy Ghost gives and preserves the supernatural life in the Church; and, as an institution of salvation, divinely-constituted, enables her to justify and sanctify all her children of all times. He enlightens her that she may always announce the doctrine of Christ, —that pure, sublime doctrine whose proper reception and practice enables all Christians to become truly good and holy. The holy Sacraments, too, which the Church administers receive their purifying and sanctifying virtue from the Holy Ghost. Defiled with the guilt of original sin, we come into this world, my brethren, the objects of God's displeasure, and are, therefore, by nature "children of wrath," incapable of ourselves of entering into heaven. It is the Holy Ghost who sanctifies us in the Sacrament of *Baptism*, cleansing us from original sin, regenerating and transforming us into beloved children of God. We have to fight against the world and the devil who lay numberless snares for us, and endeavor to ruin us for ever. At the same time, we are weak, frail, and prone to evil, for the leaven of concupiscence is not taken away from us by Baptism, but remains in us, to serve as an occasion of merit to us until the hour of death. Under these circumstances, how easy is it for us to sin and to lose the precious grace of Baptism! Here, again, it is the Holy Ghost who so perfects and strengthens the baptismal grace within us that in the contest with the enemies of our salvation, we do not succumb. He produces this effect by the Sacrament of *Confirmation*, in which he makes us strong and perfect Christians and brave soldiers of Jesus Christ. He increases not only indwelling sanctifying grace, but also enlightens us with his divine light that we may discern the delusions of the world, and the dangers that threaten our salvation. Nay, more, he endows us with supernatural strength, whereby we become able to overcome all temptations, and persevere in the state of grace to the end. And if we be so unfortunate as to forfeit the priceless grace of Baptism, it is again the Holy Ghost who awakens us from the death of sin to the life of grace in the Sacrament of *Penance*, since Christ says: "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.*" (John 20: 22, 23.) In like manner, the Holy Ghost operates in the other Sacraments; it is he who applies to us the merits of Christ, removes the leprosy of sin, justifies and sanctifies us. It is because the Holy Ghost is thus ever abiding in the Church, ever communicating to her his sanctifying grace, that she numbers at present (as she has numbered in the past and will continue to number in the future), so many among her children, who distinguish themselves by their heroic love of God and of their neighbor. The innumerable martyrs who have laid down their lives for the holy faith in the midst of the most cruel torments; the many brave Confessors who have become renowned for their zeal for the honor and glory of God, and the temporal and spiritual welfare of their fellowmen; the white-robed procession of the myriad holy

virgins who in angelic purity have followed their heavenly Bridegroom withersoever he goeth,—in short, the many illustrious Saints of every sex, age, state, and condition of life who, as star differing from star, shine in resplendent glory before us, all bear testimony by their sublime and exceptional virtues to the continual indwelling of the Paraclete with his Spouse, the Church. “The Spirit and the Bride say Come!” (Apoc. 22: 17.) O my beloved! what urgent reasons have we not, then, to thank God for being members of the Catholic Church, since in her, alone, the Holy Ghost abides; through her, alone, he announces his doctrine, imparts his grace in the holy Sacraments, and conducts men in the right way to true virtue and holiness of life! Consider it, my brethren, the greatest blessing ever bestowed upon you; esteem it as the most singular of all your privileges to belong to the holy Catholic Church, and, above all, diligently avail yourselves of her means of grace which the Holy Ghost communicates to you for your sanctification.

3. *Thirdly, the Holy Ghost governs the Church to the end of time.* The ministers of the Church, the Pope, the bishops, and the priests who, as Christ's representatives upon earth, govern the Church, have their power and authority not from man, but from the Holy Ghost. It is he who introduces them into their office, anoints them, and invests them with authority to fulfil their exalted duties for the salvation of mankind. Hence, the Apostle says: “Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20: 28.)

But the Holy Ghost not only chooses the ministers of the Church, empowers, and authorizes them to exercise their sacred functions, but that divine Spirit also continually governs the Church, protects her against all her enemies, and prevents the gates of hell from ever prevailing against her. The Church has existed for over eighteen hundred years, she has outlived all her enemies. All human institutions have changed during the course of those long and eventful ages. Kingdoms and empires have arisen, they have become great and powerful, only to fall into ruin and decay, and be supplanted in their turn by others. Even the once mighty and dominant Roman Empire has fallen and perished. The Church of Christ, the kingdom of God upon earth, exists always. With no other weapons but those of the Gospel,—prayer, sacrifice, and tears, she has resisted the most cruel persecutions of all internal and external enemies, and come forth victorious from all conflicts. For three hundred years, the sword of persecution raged against her; the blood of her martyrs flowed in streams, her noble confessors were tortured upon the rack, or languished in chains in subterranean dungeons. In vain had her adversaries sworn her annihilation; in vain, proud heresiarchs arose against her, and satanic fury labored for her downfall, she has outlived them all; and whilst persecutors, (pagan, and heretical alike,) went

the way of the flesh, she stands, to-day, as she has stood from the beginning, immovable as the Rock on which she is founded, and on which the turbulent, foaming waves of Time's ocean impotently spend their strength.

It cannot be denied, my dear brethren, that, from time to time, she has sustained painful losses and defections. Those Christian communities which once bloomed so gloriously under the sway of the great bishops, St. Athanasius, St. Cyprian, and St. Augustine, are now no more. Even those regions which the Son of God trod, glorified with his wounds, and sanctified with his blood, are desecrated at present, and for centuries have been sighing under the yoke of the infidel. In England and Germany, the Church deplores a great defection of her children; and it is only known to God when a general return to the Mother Church will take place. But, although the Church has been often and severely wounded in her members, her life could not be taken away from her. After every battle in which she has engaged, after every defeat which her enemies have imagined her to have sustained, she stood forth with new vigor and strength, and made fresh conquests, even among her bitterest foes. She resembles a sound, healthy tree which, when the withered branches are cut off, sends forth new twigs, and continues to grow and to flourish. From this, it is manifest that a higher power protects the Church and watches over her, for if she had been depending on human help, she would have shared the common lot of human institutions, and like them would have decayed and perished long ago. The Holy Ghost whom Christ sent from the Father, abides in her, governs her, and protects her against all her enemies; and, through the stormy billows of Time, through the shoals and quicksands and dangerous cliffs of Life, conducts her safely into the peaceful harbor of Eternity.

With what love and solicitude has not Christ provided for his Church ! When he withdrew his visible presence from her and ascended to his Father, he sent her the Holy Ghost that he might perfect the work of man's Redemption. The Holy Ghost *teaches* the Church. We need not fear, my brethren, to be led into error; for fortified with the Spirit of truth, the Church can propose to our belief naught, save *his* eternal truth; her utterances are the utterances of the Holy Ghost. That divine Spirit *sanctifies* the Church, for he pervades as a living fire all the workings of the peerless Spouse of Christ, actively animating her doctrine, her Sacraments, and her worship, in order to sanctify her members and lead them to their sublime, eternal destiny. The Holy Ghost *governs* the Church; therefore, she braves all the storms of time, and while all human works grow old and perish, she blossoms in full and perennial vitality, and like her divine Founder and Protector, remains unchanged for ever; at the end of time, she will pass from the state of strife into the state of never-ending triumph.

O, show yourselves grateful to the Holy Ghost, my beloved brethren, for so many and great graces which he communicates to you in the Catholic Church ! Be firm in your faith; walk the way of justice, and persevere in

virtue and good works, to the end that you may be saved. And to this end, also, let us now consider the graces which the Holy Ghost communicates in the Church to each individual soul.

II. The Holy Ghost is the dispenser of all graces. He enlightens, strengthens, consoles, and sanctifies us; wherefore he is called the Comforter and Sanctifier.

I. The Holy Ghost *enlightens* us. We have a striking instance of this truth in the case of the Apostles. Our Blessed Lord walked in the midst of them for three years, and gave them the most copious and comprehensive instructions in all the truths and mysteries of God, but with what success, my brethren? They resembled unwise children who, no matter how often you may explain a thing to them, do not comprehend it. Most of the doctrines remained obscure to them, some they did not comprehend at all; even with regard to his person and mission they had many doubts. But what a change took place, dear Christians, when they had received the Holy Ghost! Their divine Master had told them that the Holy Ghost would teach them all truth. How amazingly was this promise fulfilled! Now they understood all things whatsoever Christ had told them; now they remembered all his words; and all doubt and uncertainty departed from their minds. Not by long study, not by inquiry and deep research, a light arose in their minds. As soon as the Holy Ghost had descended on them, he enlightened their understandings, and led them into all truth.

In like manner, my brethren, the Holy Ghost *enlightens* us. To the light of his grace we are indebted for all knowledge of supernatural and divine truth. The sermons we hear, the spiritual books we read, the discourses we hold on religious subjects, would not bring us to the knowledge of the truth, if the Holy Ghost did not enlighten us. "It is the Holy Ghost, alone, that teaches us all truth and gives us a conviction of it." (St. Aug.) Our reason is weak, and of ourselves we are not able to comprehend supernatural and divine things. Again, religion contains a great many doctrines which are repugnant to flesh and blood, and which the world styles foolishness; such as, to love our enemies, to return good for evil, to mortify ourselves, to despise earthly goods, and to strive for heavenly things. If, in spite of this natural repugnance, we become convinced of the truth of these doctrines, and receive them with a believing heart, it is the work of the Holy Ghost,—it is that divine Spirit which makes us docile, enabling us to hold that to be true and good which is foolishness in the eyes of the world. It is the Holy Ghost who makes use of various means to bring us to the knowledge of what is necessary for our salvation. He teaches us by the voice of conscience what we are to do and to avoid; he illuminates the eye of the mind that it may rightly comprehend those truths and doctrines which we hear or read; he kindles, as it were, a light in our heart that we

may know the state of our soul, whether we walk in good or evil ways; he speaks to us through our pastors in the pulpit and in the confessional; he instructs us by various events, such as sickness, the sudden death of a friend or acquaintance; in short, my dear Christians, he has a thousand ways and means of enlightening us in what regards our salvation. O, that we might always open our eyes to the light of the Holy Ghost! Above all, O, that we might practise what he makes known to us as right and good!

2. The Holy Ghost *strengthens* us in doing good. Again, the Apostles are witnesses of this truth. How weak, how timid, were they before the descent of the Holy Ghost! They had, indeed, adhered to their Master with all the affection of their souls, and, even at the Last Supper, assured him in all sincerity, that they would follow him unto death. But when the time of trial came to prove their love for him, how cowardly and faint-hearted were they! They all fled when they saw him in the hands of his enemies. Peter even denied him. After his death, they concealed themselves, and continued in a retired spot in silence and fear. But from the day of Pentecost, on which the Holy Ghost came down upon them, they were totally changed. They were no longer the weak, timid disciples of the past; they were animated with that courage which shrinks from no obstacle, despises all dangers, and goes joyfully to prison and death for the sake of Jesus. Full of confidence they exclaim: "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8: 25.)

The Holy Ghost will work as miraculously in *us*, my brethren, if we put no obstacle in the way of his operations. We are naturally weak, and of our own strength we cannot effect the least thing in the business of our eternal salvation. Of ourselves, we can neither begin, nor continue, nor complete anything having a supernatural value. Neither are we able of our own natural power to overcome temptations and persevere in justice. Left to ourselves, we are capable of nothing, but of rushing headlong into all kinds of disorders. Left to ourselves, we are like a reed which is tossed to and fro by every breath of wind, which is either bent to the ground or broken by a strong breeze. It is the Holy Ghost who comes to the aid of our native impotence and fortifies us with supernatural strength, enabling us to accomplish what is necessary for our salvation. He works upon our will and moves it to begin what is good, to continue it with perseverance, and to bring it to a happy issue. He quenches the fire of concupiscence in us, and imparts to us the necessary courage and strength for the overthrow of all obstacles in the service of God. He assists us in every temptation, that we may fight the good fight and gain the victory. Fortified by his grace, though weak, we can accomplish every thing good without extraordinary exertions, and fulfil the conditions on which salvation can be obtained. Hence, my brethren, no man can plead inability as his excuse, saying: "I cannot resist temptations,—I cannot avoid sin,—I cannot

practise this or that virtue;" on the contrary, everyone must confess with the Apostle: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me."

3. The Holy Ghost *comforts* us in all the tribulations of life. When Christ was about to leave the world, he said to his disciples: "Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid." (John 14: 27.) The Apostles had no reason to grieve at the departure of their Master, for in his place he promised to send the Holy Ghost that he might comfort them in their painful labors, and sweeten every bitterness. "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of truth." (John 14: 16.) That this was no empty promise, soon became manifest when the Holy Ghost had come down upon them. Before his descent, they were grieved at the departure of Christ; timid and hesitating, nothing was capable of comforting them or of raising their drooping spirits; but from the day of Pentecost, my dear brethren, behold! they were like new men; entirely changed from what they had previously been, they went joyfully to their hard day's work, and bore with patience the heat and the burden of the day, saying, as St. Paul later exclaimed: "I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations." (2. Cor. 7: 4.)

In like manner, the Holy Ghost comforts all good and pious Christians; he fills them with joy amid the labors and trials of this mortal life, and causes them to exult even in their bitterest tribulations. We read in Church-history that many martyrs, while enduring the greatest torments, praised God and sang canticles of joy, and were as merry, in fine, as if they were seated at a luxurious banquet. "We need not be astonished at this," says St. Augustine, "for the Holy Ghost was in them." He comforted and encouraged them, he poured heavenly delight into their hearts, so that they exulted, where others, destitute of the divine Paraclete, might only sigh and groan. The Holy Ghost sweetens also all the other disagreeable things of life. Have you ever read, my dear brethren, of how a St. Anthony, after having spent the whole night in prayer, complained of the sun that it had risen too soon and disturbed him in the agreeable enjoyment of prayer? This may seem extraordinary to you, nay, may almost challenge belief, since to watch in prayer a whole night, might appear to some of you a very great hardship. But this, (as St. Augustine says), must not astonish us in St. Anthony's case; the Holy Ghost was in him, and filled him with heavenly consolation; hence, what might appear a torment to worldly people, was to *him* a pleasant and delightful exercise. We cannot understand how feeble men and women, and even little helpless children, in the ages of Faith, under the most trying circumstances, under the most varied tribulations and afflictions, could be so peaceful, so joyful, so happy! Let us give all honor and benediction, my brethren, to the Holy Ghost, for it is he who replenishes his own with these singular consolations. Samson

found honey in the lion's mouth, and the pious Christian finds joy and comfort in every trial and vicissitude of life, through the grace of the Holy Ghost.

4. We are indebted to the Third Person of the adorable Trinity for a still more precious gift. He *sanctifies* us. Let us look once more at the Apostles. They had good will, it is true, but they had, also, many faults and imperfections. Our dear Lord was frequently obliged to correct them with seemingly harsh and severe words. They were ambitious and desirous of worldly distinction; they possessed very little meekness; some of them, at times, flew into sudden gusts of passion, and even allowed thoughts of revenge to arise in their hearts. Peter fell, (all privileged as he was), and denied his Master three several times. But what a change came over them on Pentecost! These faulty, imperfect men were filled with meekness, mildness, humility, and love; no human frailties are noticeable in their conduct; they look upon the world with scorn and disdain; they despise earthly things, and with restless zeal strive for heavenly goods; in short, they are heroes of virtue, perfect Saints.

Thus the Holy Ghost sanctified the Apostles; and thus, my brethren, he will, also, sanctify us. He purifies us from the stains of sin, and removes from us whatever is displeasing to God; he justifies us, and implants in our hearts the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as well as the moral virtues, and he makes us most happily the children of God and the heirs of heaven. This sanctification he effects in the Sacraments. He communicates to us not only the grace of sanctification, but he comes to us personally and makes his permanent abode in our hearts. As omnipresent God, he is, indeed, everywhere; but as Author and Dispenser of graces, he is only in the Catholic Church, and in the soul of the just man. Having purified and sanctified us, he erects his throne in our souls and dwells there as in a temple. We cannot in the least doubt this consoling truth, since the Apostle utters it in clear and plain terms: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1. Cor. 3: 16.) Commenting on this passage, St. Augustine remarks: "Behold, the Holy Ghost dwells in just souls and is in the midst of them, as God is in his temple." This holy Spirit is, indeed, everywhere by his immensity, but in the soul of the just man he dwells in a particular, although incomprehensible, manner. He dwells there as a proprietor dwells within his own house, he dwells there as a Bridegroom who unites himself most intimately and affectionately with the soul, his spouse. O, what a grace for us, my brethren, to be found worthy to entertain so great a Guest in our hearts!

And this holy Spirit dwells in us not transiently, but permanently. He dearly loves us, as a mother loves her child; and it is his pleasure and delight to dwell in our souls. Even when we commit small faults, venial

sins, he does not withdraw his gracious presence from us; it is only mortal sin that expels him. When we commit mortal sin, we separate ourselves from God, and in the proper sense of the word become *godless*. It is, then, alas! that the Holy Ghost actually departs from us, and leaves us to our own reprobate sense, as we read in the Book of Wisdom: "The holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful, and will withdraw himself from thoughts that are without understanding, and he shall not abide when iniquity cometh in." (Wisd. 1: 5.) And St. Paul says: "If any man violate the temple of God, him God shall destroy." (1. Cor. 3: 17.) Who, then, my dear Christians, would not abhor and avoid mortal sin, which causes such a direful havoc? Who would not tremble at the least danger of committing it, since one single grievous sin changes the soul, the temple of God, into the frightful habitation of the devil, and brings eternal damnation in its train!

Reflect, then, seriously, my brethren, upon the precious graces which the Holy Ghost communicates to us by his presence. He *enlightens* us with his divine light that we may know what is good and right; he *strengthens* us that we may overcome all temptations and persevere in the fulfilment of his adorable Will; he *consoles* us by pouring heavenly peace into our hearts, preventing us from losing our interior tranquillity, even in the time of the severest trial; and finally, he *sanctifies* us, and makes his abode with us, in order to impart to us all goods and graces necessary for our salvation. That you may partake of these great graces and always preserve them, imitate the Apostles, of whom St. Luke says that "they were persevering with one mind in prayer." (Acts 1: 14.) Retired from the world, they lived in peace and harmony with one another, and persevered in prayer. Thus they prepared themselves for the advent of the Holy Ghost. "The world," says our divine Saviour, "cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him," (John 14: 17); because it is sunk deeply in the mire and filth of earthly and sensual things. *Flee from the world*, my dear brethren, or if you must deal with it, do not adopt its false maxims and principles. *Lead a retired life*; every thing that is great thrives in the shadow of solitude. *Raise up your hearts* to your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier; and constantly renew your good resolutions, if you wish to preserve in your souls the fear and the love of God. *Cherish peace, and guard against strife and contention*. The Holy Ghost is a God of peace and will dwell only in the hearts of the peaceful. *Be fervent in prayer*. Begin and end no day without a devout prayer, and while your hands are at work, let your heart be with God, frequently sending up to him some pious ejaculations. Love to go to Mass; and pray with all the fervor of your soul. Continue these pious exercises of solitude, peace, and prayer; persevere in them, dear Christians, as long as you live, that the Holy Ghost may abide in you with the gifts of his grace, and make you happy here and hereafter. Amen.

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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FEAST OF THE PATRONAGE OF ST. JOSEPH.

ON THE DIGNITY OF ST. JOSEPH, OUR MODEL AND PATRON.

*“He made him master of his house, and ruler of all his possession.”*  
*Psalm 104: 21.*

The saint whose feast we celebrate to-day, dear brethren, presents to our contemplation one of the loveliest and most charming visions in the kingdom of God. Who does not cast joyful glances at St. Joseph bearing in one hand the blooming lily, and in the other the only begotten Son of God, his Maker and Lord? Who does not contemplate with devout heart, that representative of the all-seeing Eye, who guarded so carefully the jewel committed to his care? After the most Blessed Virgin, the Queen of all the Angels and Saints, there is no saint in heaven so generally and so warmly honored as St. Joseph, who was worthy to be the Foster-father of Jesus Christ and the Spouse of his Blessed Mother; and in whom were fulfilled truly the words of holy Scripture: “He made him master of his house, and ruler of all his possession.”

The Church, dear Christians, sets her children a beautiful example of veneration and tender love for St. Joseph. She has distinguished him as she has no other saint whom she invites us to honor. Three times in the course of the Christian year, she commands the faithful to offer their homage to him. On the nineteenth of March, she invites us annually to celebrate the glorious feast of St. Joseph as a day of joyful devotion. But this single festival does not seem to satisfy her love and devotion. She adds two other feasts to this one in honor of the saint. In the month of January, every year she celebrates the feast of the Espousal of St. Joseph to the Blessed Virgin, Mary; and finally on to-day, the third Sunday after Easter, she honors the Patronage of this saint,—a feast, I may add, which our late holy Pontiff, Pius IX., of blessed memory, commanded the whole Christian world to solemnize, as was already partially done in some countries. This same high authority has also selected St. Joseph for the universal Patron of the whole of Christendom.

The true children of the Church have ever zealously imitated the love which she bears towards St. Joseph. Innumerable Churches and altars have been, from the earliest times consecrated to this saint. Religious communities and confraternities have placed themselves under his patronage, and honored him with a special love of preference. In particular, since the ninth century of the Christian era, we see the devotion to St. Joseph

always growing stronger and more fervent. The Saints of God and the chosen servants of the Lord were all filled with the strongest love and deepest veneration for this saint. This was particularly true of St. Teresa, who was animated with unbounded confidence in St. Joseph. "I do not remember," said she in her Autobiography, "ever to have asked anything of St. Joseph that I did not immediately receive. It seems as if God has given to the other Saints the power to help us in certain needs, but experience teaches us, that St. Joseph is able to help us in every emergency." "If any one will not believe my words," she continues, "I beg of him, for God's sake, to make the trial himself; he will learn from his own experience, how profitable it is to recommend himself to this glorious Patriarch, and to enroll himself among his most zealous servants."

Let us, then, my beloved brethren, follow the example of devotion set us by our holy Mother, the Church, and by her chosen servants, in venerating St. Joseph. Let us be animated by these pious examples to still greater love and confidence. In order to increase and elevate your veneration and devotion to St. Joseph, I will, to-day, endeavor to delineate the dignity and virtues of this saint. It is true that the Holy Scriptures tell us very little of St. Joseph. He is dismissed with almost a single sentence; it is only said of him that he was a just man. But the chains which, in the counsels of God, bound him to the earthly lot of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy Mother, were so sacred and grace-giving, that from them we can understand the great dignity of our Saint. And even the little that the Holy Scriptures tell us of St. Joseph, is sufficient to enlighten us as to his sanctity, by which he was made worthy of being selected for his high office.

In order to understand the dignity of St. Joseph, let us consider:

- I. The grandeur and sublimity of the call whereby he was chosen of God for his exalted vocation; and*
- II. The grandeur and sublimity of virtue with which he answered that call.*

I. The Saints of God differ in grace and dignity. As the stars of heaven in different magnitudes and in various degrees of splendor, move around the sun, so also the Saints glow and shine in manifold beauty and glory around the spiritual Sun,—Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice. The kingdom of heaven, the holy city of God, is built of various stones; and although only pure, precious stones sparkle and shine in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, yet each stone has its own peculiar beauty and color.

By what standard, my dear brethren, shall we measure the dignity and glory of a saint? If it were possible and permitted to us men to judge of the heavenly glory of a saint, what measure do reason and faith place in our hands, to enable us to estimate the dignity and glory of one such

saint? The dignity of a saint may be decided by the position and importance which is assigned to him in the kingdom of God; and this will be measured by the share which he has taken in spreading the kingdom of God here upon earth.

The more a saint of God has worked and labored to found or spread this kingdom of God upon earth, the greater will be his dignity, and elevation, and glory in the heavenly kingdom. Holy Scripture says, that the king of heaven and earth has given various talents to his servants. "To one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability." (Matt. 25: 15.) But he who traded with profit with the five talents, received a greater reward than those to whom the Lord has entrusted two or three talents.

Contemplate now St. Joseph and measure his heavenly dignity by this standard. Does he not stand forth prominently in the first place in the kingdom of God? Is not he, in union with the most Blessed Virgin, one of the foundation stones upon which is builded the whole kingdom of redemption in Jesus Christ our Saviour? Did not he, with the Mother of Jesus, do the highest, noblest, greatest, and most meritorious work for the foundation of the Church of Christ upon earth? He was appointed to be the father of the Son of God, and the Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The dearest ones upon whom the eye of God had rested since the days of eternity—his only-begotten, eternal Son,—whom he brought forth from his bosom before the morning-stars were created; that only-begotten Son in whom he is well pleased; and the most Blessed Virgin whom, in eternal love, his eye had selected from among thousands to be the mother of the Son of God, and the bride of the Holy Ghost—these great and inestimable treasures of holiness were intrusted to St. Joseph by the Providence of God.

And God did not merely choose St. Joseph to be the earthly father of our Saviour and the Spouse of his Holy Mother; he was also their protector and support. He was chosen by the Lord to earn the daily bread of the only-begotten Son and his holy Mother by his labors and travails. He was thus enabled to offer to the Son of God and to his most holy and blessed Mother, the first and highest service of this earthly life.

Besides being selected as father and supporter of the Holy Family, my brethren, he was also dignified with the office of Teacher of the Son of God. For the Redeemer of the world, the only-begotten Son of his Heavenly Father, wished to resemble us in all things. He wished to be born as a child, and to grow up like one; and on this account, he wished to look up to his father upon earth with the humility and submission of a child, obeying all his commands. And it was to the holy hands of St. Joseph that the office of teacher of Jesus Christ was intrusted. He it was, who, by his loving admonitions and prayers, by his piety and his shining example,

accomplished, in the most splendid manner, the earthly education of the only-begotten Son of God.

After the dignity and distinction of the Blessed Virgin Mary, can there be a greater or higher office than this? We esteem ourselves fortunate, if we can do even the most trifling thing for the spreading of the kingdom of God upon earth. The Saints of heaven thanked the Lord with jubilation, if they were able to assist in laying the smallest stone for the foundation of that blessed and glorious kingdom. But St. Joseph was enabled to offer to the Son of God and to his holy Mother, the greatest love and service. He was chosen to be the Foster-father, the supporter, and the teacher of the Son of God. “O miracle of exaltation,” exclaims the pious Gerson, “the incarnate Son calls thee his father and obeys thee! How could we, here below, imagine anything so great, so affecting, and so excellent!”

What majesty and glory must have been reflected from on high on him who was selected to share in such high offices! What holiness of life must have adorned St. Joseph, who was chosen to be a foundation-stone of the kingdom of God upon earth! If the Lord sanctified the Blessed Virgin in her Immaculate Conception and preserved her from every stain of sin, so that she might be worthy to be the Mother of our Redeemer; if he sanctified St. John, the Baptist, in his mother’s womb, because he was appointed to be the Precursor of our Saviour; if the Lord filled with richest graces every being that surrounded the birth and the earthly life of the Messiah; and if a power went forth from the Son of God, himself, which healed and satisfied every one—what sanctity must have been *his* share who, (chosen by God to be the Foster-father of Jesus Christ,) lived continually in his presence? What fulness of heavenly benediction must crown St. Joseph whom God appointed as “the master of his house, and ruler of all his possessions”?

How shall we estimate, dear Christians, the dignity of this saint? His greatness and glory consist not merely in the position which, as a saint, he occupies in the heavenly kingdom; nor yet is it to be measured by the labor and industry which he expended in building up that kingdom upon the earth; but it must be measured by the degree of inward virtue and perfection which he reached in the sanctification of his own soul. This is the great two-fold duty to which man should direct all his pains and labors—the establishing and perfecting of the kingdom of God upon the earth, and the sanctification of his own soul.

But this sanctification of our souls consists simply in this, that we conform our wills to the holy will of God. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification,” exclaims St. Paul. (1. Thess. 4: 3.) The more a man tries and succeeds in subjecting his will to that of God, in breaking down his own will with its sinful desires, and in uniting it with the divine will, so much the higher will his degree of sanctity be. He will be, in truth, a child of God. He will closely resemble his Saviour, who fulfilled the will

of his Father, and who left us, as the highest degree of sanctity, this expression: "Father! not my will but thine be done." (Luke 22: 42.)

If, then, this union of our human will with the will of our heavenly Father is the measure of our sanctity and heavenly glory, in what a new splendor does St. Joseph appear before us! He was not chosen to strive after perfection by submitting his will to the divine will; but, as the Foster-father of the only-begotten Son of God, he commanded certain things, and the eternal God of heaven and earth, (who appeared among us in the form of a servant,) obeyed his will. St. Augustine justly says: "The dignity of the Saints consists in this,—that they were subject to Christ; but that of St. Joseph, that Christ was subject to him." This saint was not chosen merely to be one of the most important pillars of the kingdom of God upon earth and the Foster-father of Jesus Christ; but he was elected to be that just man to whose will the Lord of heaven and earth was subject and obedient. Could there be a higher vocation, could there be a greater distinction than this in the whole kingdom of God?

The highest and holiest power upon the earth is the authority of a father over his child. This parental authority is the outcome and image of God's paternity, of his eternal power over us, his children,—the most supreme and legitimate authority that can be imagined. All authority assumed by earthly governments, and all that is exercised over us by the Church of Jesus Christ, is nothing but an extension of parental authority. The father has an unlimited power over his child. St. Joseph possessed the fulness of this unlimited power over the only-begotten Son of God. That eternal right by which the Father in heaven spoke to his only, beloved Son: "Thou art my Son, from the womb before the day-star I begot thee," (Ps. 109: 3,) that sublime right he intrusted, my brethren, to St. Joseph. And that paternal authority the saint exercised over our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, not by virtue of an earthly conception, but by virtue of the will of God himself, the eternal Father. He commanded the only-begotten Son of God as his father, and he exercised this power by the highest and holiest authority. "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," said the Blessed Virgin, in the temple to her Son. (Luke 2: 48.) This is a new splendor of his heavenly office which is peculiar to St. Joseph, and is shared by no other saint in heaven.

We are astonished at the dignity of the ancient Joshua, the leader of the people of Israel, at whose mighty word the sun stood still in its course. We wonder at the power which God has given to the word of his servant. But St. Joseph did not command merely the earthly sun, but he exercised authority over the eternal Sun of Justice, over him who created the sun and all the constellations of the heavens.

In the warfare of Christian life, we exhaust ourselves in trying to bring our wills in accord with the divine will; and we esteem it as a certain degree of perfection, if we have secured this union with regard to this or

that command. We conceive it to be the highest degree of holiness and salvation to be able to adore as children, the Lord God, our Father in heaven, and to follow the Lamb in the kingdom of his glory, withersoever he goeth. But St. Joseph approached his God with the dignity of paternal authority; and the Lamb of God followed his word and his commands. "He made him master of his house and ruler of all his possession."

II. The office which, by God's choice, is entrusted to a man, is simply a means to an end; it is, in itself, neither the sanctification nor the end of a Christian. The office is only the foundation which God, in his mercy, lays, and upon which man, by faithful co-operation, may erect the building of his sanctification and eternal salvation; and may make himself worthy of the vocation to which God has called him. The more a man co-operates with the grace of God, and the more he enters into the scheme of divine grace by the efforts of his own will, the more just and pleasing in the sight of God does he become. Therefore, my brethren, St. Joseph is not great in our eyes, merely because of the high office and the distinction with which the Lord adorned him; he is also great because of the virtues by which he proved himself worthy of his high office.

I might speak of the numerous virtues which, by the grace of God, St. Joseph practised. I might speak of his protecting care of the Blessed Virgin and her divine Son. I might speak of his meekness and obedience. But I wish only to mention the particular virtue possessed by our saint, and which he practised in a higher degree than all other Saints, and which forms the distinguishing feature of his holiness.

Behold, dear Christians, it is St. Joseph's *simplicity of heart* which forms above and beyond all the distinguishing characteristic of his whole being—simplicity of heart which is the expression of exalted piety and the purest love of God. The most profound, as well as the most exalted, mysteries of God were intrusted to the careful hands of our beloved saint; and he, the plain, simple mechanic, watched over them with the greatest humility and discretion. He did not doubt the word of the Angel. He did not dare to test or examine into it. In the simplicity of his heart, he is happy and content to be able to offer the most trifling temporal service to his heavenly Lord. He would have been happy, in this humble disposition of his great soul, if he had been called to the lowest place in the household of his God and King. He, whom the Lord made master of his house, and ruler of all his possession, goes through life as a plain, unassuming mechanic,—so silent, so full of heavenly recollection, that the Holy Scriptures do not record a single word that ever fell from his lips. His whole life was dedicated to care and labor for his tender Spouse and her divine Son; in simplicity of heart, in modest retirement and reticence, did he fulfil the duties of the highest office ever confided to man.

O, that this simplicity of heart might adorn us all, my brethren! It is,

as the highest degree of humility, the perfection of true sanctity. In simplicity of heart should we all fill the offices to which the Lord has called us; content and happy in that place in his kingdom to which his love has appointed us, even if he asks only the smallest and most menial service at our hands. Our understanding and our will must be lost in the holy will and the mysterious plans of God, which it must be our study to fulfil in simplicity of heart, and in humble and faithful obedience. Would not this simplicity of heart be an incalculable blessing to thousands in our times? Does not an inordinate longing, a restless ambitious impulse towards greater and higher things, daily take possession of multitudes around us in the various walks of life? A man imagines himself born to a more exalted and luxurious condition than that in which he finds himself, and, urged by the insatiate cravings of his passions, instead of going on his appointed way in simplicity of heart, following obediently the path which the God of heaven has pointed out to him, he believes he has a right to higher pretensions.

This discontent with the will of God, which penetrates and pervades the masses of human society, is a part of the great social disorder which torments our times. May St. Joseph obtain for us all, dear brethren, a share of his own beautiful virtue of simplicity of heart, so that we may do our duty with humility, modesty, and contentment, in the station of life in which we have been placed! We shall be happy and satisfied with the thought that we, also, in the wise providence of God, have been called to a place in which we may serve him to his honor and our own salvation.

Let us further consider, beloved Christians, the deep and unshaken confidence of St. Joseph which justly distinguishes and glorifies him—that confidence in God which reflects in itself the submission of man to his Creator, his Master, and sovereign Lord! Ignorant of the designs of the Most High which had been fulfilled by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, his Spouse,—his faithful and pure heart was inundated by a sea of doubt and anxiety. But an immovable confidence and a holy reliance on God filled him, when the Angel announced to him these words: “Fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost.” (Matt. 1: 20.) How strong was this confidence in God after the birth of the Divine Child! Scarcely is the Holy Infant born in the deepest poverty and humility, than an Angel appears to St. Joseph in a dream, and commands him to take the Child and his Mother, and fly into Egypt; and remain there until the death of his enemy.

Should not new doubts and suspicions arise in the soul of the saint at the thought that the Redeemer of the world is obliged to fly before his enemies in order to save his life? But the message of the Angel strengthens his confidence; and when he recalls what the tongue of that celestial messenger had already announced to him: “That which is conceived in her,

is of the Holy Ghost,"—then every shadow of doubt vanishes, every cloud of care is dispersed. In due time, he leads the holy Child and his Mother back to Nazareth. There the little Jesus grows up before his eyes like any other child of earth, subject to the same wants and needs of human nature; and only by degrees, in the latter days of his life, raising the veil of human flesh which has concealed his glorious divinity. Has not here the old suspicion of St. Joseph's soul cause to be repeated? The Angels asseveration is enough for him: "That which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost." These words are the immovable and invincible strength of his soul's confidence.

Thus, also, my brethren, the way of our life is often dark and confused; and a mixture of doubts and cares many times surrounds and oppresses us. The veil of uncertainty, which, according to the wisdom of God, is spread over every human existence, is only lifted by degrees. Anxious and troubled, the eye beholds in trembling fear many mysterious occurrences, knowing not to what end or aim they lead. In such moments, let us, my brethren, like St. Joseph, hold fast in holy confidence to the words of the Angel, which, in a spiritual manner, will be fulfilled in our souls: "That which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost." Every event, every operation, every single day of our lives is conceived by the Spirit of God, and ordained by his will; ordained and conceived only for our salvation. In this faith, let us hold fast in unwavering confidence, even though our way through life be constantly beset by many and bewildering accidents. "That which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost."

My dear brethren, I cannot praise the particular virtues of St. Joseph without speaking of that which is the height and perfection of his sanctity—his virginity and his angelic purity, whose symbol, the pure and undefiled lily, he bears in his hand. Only one flame burned in his heart, the pure flame of love for Jesus Christ, his Redeemer, and for his chaste Mother, by whom he was conceived. The high and single aim of his life was to serve the Son of God and his holy Mother in entire purity and simplicity of heart. If the Lord chose the Blessed Virgin in undefiled purity, and if he sanctified her by his grace even before her birth; and if the Holy Ghost descended from his heavenly throne to overshadow her, so that in purity she might conceive and bring forth Purity and Sanctity itself,—must not St. Joseph, my brethren, have also shone resplendent in purity, since he was chosen to fill the place nearest to supreme Purity and Sanctity; since he was selected to be the Foster-father of God's Holy One and the Spouse of the Immaculate Virgin?

"Let us make him a help like unto himself," said the Lord, of old, in Paradise when he would create a wife for the first man. (Gen. 2: 48.) He did not merely wish to create a partner for our first father, Adam, with the same natural dispositions and wants as his own, but also, to adorn her with the same high graces and prerogatives which he had granted to him, her

spouse. And he created Eve as complete and perfect a being, as he had created and formed Adam. Since St. Joseph was chosen as a helper to the pure and immaculate Virgin, and as the Foster-father of Jesus Christ, must he not be a helper resembling the Mother and the Son in sanctity and purity? "God gave Adam a wife resembling himself," says St. Peter Damian, "so also he gave to the Blessed Virgin a Spouse resembling her closely in soul."

Even if the Lord had not distinguished St. Joseph with the highest gifts of purity and sanctity, his nearness to the God of holiness and to the Blessed Virgin must have made him resemble in a remarkable degree those marvels of purity and holiness. The Holy Writ tells us that two cherubim of the purest beaten gold spread their wings over the Ark of the Covenant. "He made two cherubim also of beaten gold, which he set on the two sides of the propitiatory; spreading their wings, and covering the propitiatory, and looking one towards the other, and towards it." (Exod. 37: 7-9.) Thus the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph stand like two cherubim, shining with the purest and most heavenly splendor over the propitiatory, over the earthly life of the Only-begotten Son of God. These two were created and formed only to protect and watch over him, to look always at him, and to love each other only in and for him. All the splendor of the gold fell upon the propitiatory and was reflected back upon these two.

Let us, therefore, my beloved Christians, imitate this highest of all virtues, the angelic purity of St. Joseph, together with all his other perfections. In every condition of life, whether bound by the holy Sacrament of Matrimony, or chained by an eternal vow of chastity, or in a free and single state—let us always practise purity and chastity according to our state, imitating St. Joseph who lived like an Angel in the flesh, and through whose intercession we may hope for this heavenly grace.

Although we have not been called to the high and holy office with which St. Joseph was honored, still we should endeavor to become members of that Holy Family whose head we, to-day, glorify. If we are the redeemed of Jesus Christ, brethren of the Only-begotten Son of God, and if we can in truth call the Blessed Virgin our Mother, then, by the same right, St. Joseph is our father. May he become and remain, beloved brethren, our holy, gracious, and mighty father! Let us, to-day, in an especial manner invoke his patronage, and place ourselves, once and for all, under his powerful protection. We will imitate his holy virtues; we will obey him to whom Jesus Christ was subject; and with love and tenderness, as his children, will he carry us upon his strong arms through life, as he bore him, our God and our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is worthy of benediction and honor and glory through all eternity! Amen.

JOSEPH EHRLER, Bishop of Spire.

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## THE POWER OF A WORD.

*“Let every man be swift to hear; but slow to speak.” St. James 1: 19.*

The gift of speech, my beloved brethren, is a sacred trust from God, and we must use it with great caution, and not risk the danger of profaning it by undervaluing its importance. “Let every man be swift to hear; but slow to speak.” Speech is silver, silence is gold. Therefore, be slow to speak, for it is hardly possible to over-estimate the dangers that may accrue from every word that escapes one’s lips. Yes, my brethren, be not hasty in your speech; for it is with a word as with a stone cast from the hand,—once let go, it can never be recalled. Furthermore, your words will furnish matter for your future judgment; and every idle word you have spoken here below, will have its dreaded place in that final account. Hence, my brethren, avoiding idle, useless, imprudent, sinful words, be slow and wary in whatever you say. Some of God’s commandments directly concern this matter of our tongues, our daily speech. The Second Commandment, for instance, forbids us to be idle in our use of the holy name of God; the Eighth forbids us to be idle, false, or rash in our expressed judgment of our neighbor. Indeed, the whole law of Charity towards God and our neighbor regulates our words, as well as our thoughts and acts. And on this account, when we are seeking God’s pardon for our sins, we humble ourselves in the candid confession we make, acknowledging that we have grievously sinned in thought, word, and deed. Speaking of the tongue, St. James, (who, in our text of to-day, so fitly cautions us to be slow of speech,) further demonstrates to us its singular power for good or evil: “By it we bless God and the Father; and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be.”

It cannot be difficult for us, dear Christians, enlightened by God’s grace, to know the faults against which we must be on our guard, and in regard to which we must regulate our tongues. I have just observed that there are two commandments which directly concern this regulation of the tongue, one, in the first place, which has reference to its duties to God, the other, in the second place, which has reference to its duties to our neighbor. The most notable faults of this unruly member which our own unhappy experience as well as that of the great mass of our fellow-men, presents to our consideration, my brethren, are

- I. *Sins of falsehood;*
- II. *Sins of blaspheming, cursing, and profane language;*
- III. *Immodest conversations; and*
- IV. *Uncharitable conversations about others.*

To discuss these important breaches of the divine law, and to suggest the proper remedies for some of these crying evils, shall be the purpose of my present discourse.

I. *Sins of falsehood.* These are more directly forbidden by the Eighth Commandment, in so far as they are directed against our neighbor, whom we are forbidden to injure by false testimony and lies; but they are really forbidden also by an instinct of our nature which we outrage every time, we contradict with our tongue that which our mind knows to be the truth. God, my brethren, has infused into every human soul a sense of the distinction between truth and falsehood; and every man knows that it is right to speak the truth, and that it is wrong, and against the natural law written upon our hearts, to utter a lie. "Lying lips," says the Inspired Writer, "are an abomination to the Lord." God not only dislikes a lie, he *abominates* it. He is Eternal Truth—he is indivisible simplicity; hence, my brethren, he recoils with indescribable horror from all dissimulation and double-dealing. "The holy spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful." (Wisdom 1: 5.) Beseech our Lord, then, daily that, being "slow to speak,"—each word that you utter may be so richly adorned with truth and sincerity as to invite into your soul the Eternal Truth and the Holy Spirit of discipline, and incline them to abide with you forever.

II. Another notable fault of the tongue proceeding from the neglect of the admonition to be slow to speak, is a violation of the Second Commandment of God which forbids *cursing, blaspheming, and profane language.* The threat which is appended to the prohibition expressed in this commandment, ought of itself to impress all with the necessity of caution in their speech: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord, his God, in vain." And yet, how heedless are many, very many persons in transgressing this law? Parents not unfrequently do not hesitate to correct their children in a spirit of anger, and think that they give additional force to their correction, by pouring forth the bitterest curses upon their unfortunate offspring, and blaspheming God in their presence. Surely these things, as St. James says, ought not to be; yet, the sinner addicted to this vice, will declare to the priest who rebukes him for it, "Father, I cannot help it!" He would soon learn to "help it," if every oath, every curse, every blasphemy, cost him on the spot the loss of some one of the temporal goods he so highly values,—a valuable watch, for

instance, or a purse of gold, or even some little sacrifice of his personal vanity. A story is told of an old military officer much given to cursing, who, after repeated relapses into that sin, was advised by his confessor to cut a button from the breast of his full-dress uniform, every time he permitted a profane word to escape his lips. You may judge, my brethren, how efficacious was the penance, when I tell you that the old officer *never lost but one button!* O, shame, shame upon our degenerate Christianity which would value a miserable button more than that pure, disinterested love of God which, alone, should prompt us to fulfil his divine commands!

III. *Immodest conversation*, (of which St. Paul so well says, that it ought never to be tolerated, as becometh Saints,) is another mode of offending against the proper slowness in speech. This it is which constitutes much of that frivolous and idle talk, of which our dear Lord reminds us we shall have to give an account in our future judgment. It is not my purpose at present, dear brethren, to dwell upon this subject, but I will only say to you that, since the God of all purity and holiness rests so often upon your tongue in holy Communion, you should strive with all your power to preserve that member free from the defilement of improper conversation and low, scurrilous jests. "I am the lover of purity," says our Lord through the devout À Kempis, but he adds, "and the giver of all holiness;" so that if we desire the gift of a pure, modest tongue, all we have to do is to ask it of Jesus in holy Communion, and he will assuredly grant us that treasure of holiness.

IV. But there is one matter, my beloved brethren, into which it is of practical importance to enter a little more fully, and that is *uncharitable conversation about others*. The character, the failings, the imperfections of others, certainly do supply abundant topics for our intercourse with each other. If no one ever spoke of the faults of others, or indulged in judgments or criticisms upon his or her neighbor, the world would be much more silent than it is; and I can assure you, dear Christians, that nothing would be lost, but very much gained by such silence. People would, then, be able to think upon other and more important subjects, and engage in more agreeable converse upon what might be unto edification. You remember the instance, so beautifully related by St. Luke, in the last chapter of his Gospel, of how our Lord appeared in a disguised form to the two disciples travelling to Emmaus. The two men were journeying along the road from Jerusalem, talking and reasoning with each other as they went; but, lo! Jesus overtakes them, breaks in upon them, interrupts them in their conversation, and asks them the question: "What are these discourses that you are holding with one another?" Suppose, my brethren, on those occasions when we are engaged in animated conversation at home

or abroad, that this same question were asked of us; or, suppose, that it occurred to us in the midst of our talk to make a sudden act of self-examination, and candidly ask ourselves: "What am I now talking about?" The chances are that we would find ourselves discussing something or other that concerned our neighbor, and, alas! only too often to his detriment or disadvantage. Since, then, our fellow-men thus furnish us with a very fertile subject of conversation, it will be well, dear friends, to know and master, (so as to apply,) the Christian principles by which we are to regulate our tongues.

Three rules are often laid down by spiritual and moral writers on this point; and if they were only faithfully observed, perhaps every fault, certainly a great many faults would be avoided.

a) The first rule is: "*If you cannot speak well of your neighbor, do not speak of him at all.*" If you think ill of him, or, if he with whom you may be conversing, entertains a bad opinion of him, the probability is that prejudice will affect your judgment, and that you will express yourself under the influence of this prejudice. Or, perhaps your companion may, as yet, be ignorant of the evil which you are inclined to tell him about the absent one, and so you will be instrumental in spreading what the law of charity commands you to keep secret.

b) The second rule is: "*Do not say in the absence of your neighbor what you would not say in his presence.*" For, apart from the fact that whatever we say or do against our neighbor is accounted by our Lord as said or done against himself,—"as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it unto me," (Matt. 25: 40,)—it is very unfair, it is wanting in honest frankness to wound a person in the dark, when he has no means of defending or justifying his conduct.

c) The third rule is: "*Say not of another what you would not have another say of you.*" This, my brethren, is a fundamental principle of charity,—that we should do to others as we would be done by; and even the instinct of nature itself bears testimony to the utility and soundness of this well-named "golden rule". Strive earnestly, dear Christians, to act habitually in conformity with all these rules; and you will find that they serve as a powerful check upon your tongue when it is about to utter something displeasing to God and detrimental to your neighbor. You will be slow to speak, but, happily, under their prudent influences, you will prevent charity from being wounded and violated.

There is an Eastern proverb, my brethren, which expresses simply but strikingly the necessity for regulating the tongue, and for being very cautious and slow of speech. It runs thus: "*Before you speak a word, you are its master; after you have spoken it, you become its slave.*" Is not this very

true, dear friends? Before you speak a word, you are its master, because, of course, at that time it is locked up in your breast; you have it completely under your control. You can keep it enclosed in the prison, in which it is confined, forever if you will. You may allow it to die there unspoken, unheard, and incapable of exerting any influence upon others. You are its master. But, alas! what a change takes place when you have spoken it! You, then, become its slave. You have allowed it to escape, it is no longer under your control. It proclaims its independence, it works its way in spite of you. Nay, more, it tyrannizes over you, it stands up and defies you, and makes you abide all its consequences, whatever they may be. No unsaying what you are known to have said, no apology, no explanation, can recall the fact that the word has been said. A word and a stone once let go, cannot be recalled. Mighty for evil may be a single unguarded word! It turns state's evidence against you, and may be the means of precipitating the most fatal consequences to the speaker. Be slow, then, to speak, and be not too ready to yield that power, that authority which silence gives you, but which an unguarded, imprudent speech may take from you only too quickly, and turn against you forever.

In conclusion, my brethren, it only remains for us to bear in mind that the blessing of speech, like every other blessing bestowed upon us by our good God, is intended to help us on towards the eternal end for which he has destined us. There are dangers and evils connected with this gift which we must avoid, and against which, having been solemnly cautioned, we must remain upon our guard; but there are virtues which we can cultivate, good deeds which we can practice or further, merits which we can acquire, and an imperishable reward, in short, which we can eventually secure, if we use it to the glory of God, to the benefit of our neighbor, and to our own sanctification, that noble attribute of speech by which we resemble God, in his eternal generation of the divine Word, and by which we are doing here below the work of his glorious Angels and Saints. What good can we not do by the proper use of this gift! We can speak words of charity and kindness; we can console those that are in sorrow; we can instruct the ignorant and counsel the doubtful; we can go into the houses of the poor, and to the bed-side of the sick and suffering, and whisper words of resignation and encouragement. We can do to these what the angel did to our dear Lord agonizing in Gethsemane; we can extol the will of the heavenly Father, and, begging them to make their sacrifice generously, we can persuade those poor sufferers to accept the divine dispensations with a good heart and a willing soul. We can really be anticipating here below the happy work which is to occupy us hereafter in heaven, and moved by a sweet spirit of love and union, we can unite ourselves more closely to our fellow-creatures in the bonds of fraternal charity and help each other on continually in our journey to heaven. A gift intended for good, we can use for good; and instead of having our words

one day brought up in judgment against us, let us, my brethren, make them plead our cause, and gain it at the supreme Tribunal,—receiving at the hands of him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, the reward of singing his praises for all eternity, and of acting forevermore that glorious part which we shall have prepared and rehearsed by our pure, holy words and deeds here below. Amen.

SWEENEY, O. S. B.

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## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

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WHITHER GOEST THOU?

*“Now I go to him that send me; and none of you asketh me: ‘Whither goest thou?’” John 16: 5.*

Why is it that none of his disciples asked Jesus: “Whither goest thou?” Because sorrow had deprived them of speech. This gentle reproach seems almost to have been expressive of surprise on the part of our divine Lord. But is it not more surprising still and, at the same time, less excusable on our part, my beloved brethren, “knowing that while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord,” that we should hardly ever put the above question to ourselves: “Whither goest thou?” Yet, on the answer to this simple, but very important question, depends an eternity of happiness or an eternity of woe. First, we must know the right way to our true Home,—this regards the proper use of our *understanding*; secondly, if we have entered on the right road, we must pursue it to the end with an unswerving fidelity,—this regards the proper use of our *will*. As long as we are in this world, my brethren, we are exiles and wanderers, for, as St. Paul says: “Here we have no permanent city, but we seek one to come.” (Hebr. 13: 14.) Since, then, we are wanderers, since we are exiles on the way to our true Home, why should we not, each one of us, often ask our soul: “Whither goest thou?” But before answering this question, I will ask another: “Whither must we go?” The Old Testament begins with these significant words: “In the beginning God created *heaven* and earth.” (Gen. 1: 1.) The work of creation occupied six days; on the sixth day, “the Lord God formed *Adam* of the slime of the earth,” (Gen. 2: 7,) and “built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman,” (Gen. 2: 22,) and thus, with the creation of man, he finished his grand work.

Please, attend to this important fact, my dear brethren; the *first* work of God in the beginning was the creation of heaven, and the *last* was the creation of man; heaven the beginning, man the end,—a sublime commencement and conclusion, which teach us that heaven is made for man, and

man for heaven. Whither, then, must we go? To that place for which we are created, namely, *to heaven!* But are we willing to go there? This seems to be a superfluous question, for there is no one so perverse who will not say: "I wish nothing more ardently or sincerely, than to go to heaven!" Such a desire is highly commendable, my dear Christians; but the desire alone will not suffice; not every one who wishes to go to heaven, will arrive there, since, "Not every one that saith to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," says Christ, "but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How few there are, who sincerely follow Jesus, and do the will of his Eternal Father, yet all wish to be admitted into his kingdom. If the desire sufficed, no one would be lost. But the mere desire avails nothing.

Whither, then, goest thou? The answer is plain. By the way of death into eternity; for "it is appointed for men once to die." (Hebr. 9: 27.) But through that way of death, we must pass either into a happy or into a miserable eternity. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel . . . . before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose, shall be given him." (Eccles. 15: 14-18.) The life we lead gives the answer to the question: "Whither goest thou?" Or, as the established proverb hath it: Death is the echo of life. If we live well, we will die well; if we live ill, we will die ill; "as a man lives so he shall die."

In the thirty-first chapter of the Book of Proverbs we read, that "the valiant woman shall laugh in the latter day (of her life)." (Prov. 31: 25.) The Holy Scripture adding the reason for her laughter says: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates!" (Prov. 31: 31.) The fruit of her hands are her various good works, which are mentioned, and these good works shall praise her in the gates. In what gates, my beloved brethren, shall the praise of valiant women resound? In the gates of death and eternity. When, through the iron gate of death, the valiant woman passes to the golden gate of Paradise, truly will she laugh with Christian joy and triumph. But the case is different with those whose hands are empty of good works, and whose feet are entangled in the snares of vice and crime. Shall they, also, laugh in the latter day? Many sinners live now without care or fear in the midst of feasting and criminal enjoyments; they laugh and sing and make merry; but will they, also, be without fear on the day of judgment? Such persons may cry out with king David: "Why shall I fear evil in the evil day?" (Ps. 48: 6.)—But I answer you in the solemn, prophetic words of the same king David: "The iniquity of the heel shall encompass thee." (Ps. 48: 6.) If, during your life, you live in sin, how can you expect in the end to win Paradise? Do you not well know that nothing defiled can enter heaven?

As the tree falls, so shall it lie. As we go out of this life, dear brethren,

so we shall enter into eternity. If our hands, like those of the valiant woman are full of good works, we shall, also, laugh like her upon the last day. If, on the contrary, our hands are empty of good works, whilst our iniquities, like burning sandals, are clinging to our heels, we shall surely perish. Therefore, I ask, again, each Christian before me: “‘Whither goest thou’ in the affair of thy salvation?” The life you lead will give a prompt answer to this question. How do the generality of men live? All are ready to admit the fact that they are mortal, yet, the generality of people live, as though they were never to die. They lead sinful lives. It is an established fact that a bad life is almost invariably followed by a bad death, and a bad death, invariably, by an unhappy eternity. Yet, there are none, as the prophet Jeremiah complains, who reflect upon these solemn truths. “With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart.” (Jer. 12: 11.) If men would often ask themselves: “Whither goest thou?”—crimes and iniquities would be diminished or eradicated from the face of the earth. “In all thy works remember thy last end; and thou shalt never sin.” (Eccles. 7: 40.) Who would attach his heart inordinately to this or that creature, if he considered seriously, that such a sinful attachment would separate him forever from his God? Who would follow the pride and vanity of the world, if he reflected seriously that, one day, he would have to answer for his folly? Who would credit a deceitful world, who would listen willingly to the universal Tempter of mankind, if he considered, that both those cruel foes are continually and unpityingly bent upon his ruin? Who would dare to commit any kind of sin, even in the greatest secrecy, if he recalled to mind, that the unsleeping Eye of God is ever upon him by day and night?—In effect, my brethren, the world would soon present a different aspect, if all men in all their works considered their last end; if they often asked themselves the important question: “Whither goest thou?” Oh! then, would they watch their thoughts, set a guard upon their tongues, and strive to work out their salvation by doing what is good and pleasing to God. But people hardly ever think of their last end; they live in an entire forgetfulness of God and eternity, in a state of the greatest indifference as to spiritual things,—yet, they feed their souls on the presumptuous hope of dying well. All, indeed, like the sinful prophet Balaam, wish to die the death of the just, but they are unwilling to live the life of the just. Ah! the latter is far too painful to flesh and blood. But if we live not the life of the just, how can we expect to die the death of the just? What presumption, to wish to resign our spirit happily and peacefully into the hands of the Lord, when, from the very first use of our reason, we have never ceased to offend him!

We cannot be saved, my brethren, unless we die well; we cannot die well unless we live well; but to wish to die well without being willing to live well, is to insult God by the rankest presumption, and to precipitate ourselves headlong into perdition. This is the simplest and clearest of

logic. The rule of our life must infallibly be the rule of our death; it is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, (according to revelation), to live in sin and to die in the grace of God; since, to repeat the text of the Inspired Word, “as a man lives, so shall he die.”

It is true, God may work a miracle in favor of the sinner in his dying hour, but what right has a sinner to expect such a miraculous interposition in his behalf, when during his lifetime, he perversely and persistently refused to turn from his evil ways? No, my brethren, he who lives in darkness, will die in darkness, and be punished according to his works. God is merciful to those that love him; even to the unhappy sinner, he gives time and grace for repentance; but if he neglect this grace, God will abandon him to the hardness of his heart; he will sink deeper and deeper into the mire of his iniquities; and, at length, die in his sins. “You shall seek me, and shall not find me.” (John 7: 34.) Hence, dear Christians, it is our duty not to delay our conversion to the end of life; not to postpone our repentance to that night when no man can work, but to work whilst it is day, whilst we are in health and strength. “Thou mayest do a great many things whilst thou art well; but when thou art sick, I know not what thou wilt be able to do.” (Imit. of Chris., lib. 1: 33.) O ye sinners, who habitually violate the laws of God and of his Church, heaping sin upon sin; who neglect for years and years, those blessed means of salvation, prayer, and the holy Sacraments, if God, the Master of life and death, should call you suddenly out of this world before his judgment-seat, how, I ask you, to-day, would matters stand with your immortal souls?—We frequently hear of sad accidents; that such a one was found dead in his bed; another fell from a house-top and broke his neck; this one was drowned, that one burned to death. What has happened to others, may also happen to me and to you. A sudden death is not necessarily an unprovided death; but, alas! the most of those who die suddenly, die unprovided; hence, the Church enjoins us in her Litany to pray: “From a sudden and unprovided death, O Lord, deliver us!” And if *we*, my beloved brethren, die suddenly, what will be the consequence? Two things are possible. “If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be;” (Eccles. 11: 3,) that is, man will die either prepared or unprepared; in what place soever the tree shall fall, there shall it remain forever, either in heaven or in hell. But whither shall the tree fall? Pay attention to the branches; to which side do most of them incline? To that side, the tree shall assuredly fall. If the branches lean toward the south, the tree shall fall to the south; if, on the other hand, they lean toward the north, it will fall to the north. If, at the last hour, we are provided with good works, if our lamp, like those of the wise virgins, be filled with oil and burning, we shall happily be found prepared, and the Bridegroom of our souls will gladly admit us to heaven; but, if our lamp be void of oil,—if, like the five foolish virgins, we shall be found unprovided at the coming of the Bride-

groom, we shall hear the door of the heavenly kingdom shut upon us, and while we abide in that exterior darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, we shall hear with horror the voice of the Lord exclaiming: "Amen I say to you, I know you not." Saint Anselm, meditating on these words of the Scripture, breaks forth in these humble and touching lamentations: "My life terrifies me, yes, my whole life; for although it is not always sinful, it is always imperfect; so that, although it does not displease God, it certainly cannot please him."

If Saints tremble, how much more ought we, my brethren, to tremble, who are so far distant from their perfection? If the Saints of God have declared that the vision of their lives, (spent in the practice of every virtue), terrified them, how much more should our sinful and lukewarm lives terrify us? My brethren, there is question here of an unknown eternity, and no security can be too great, where such a prize is at stake. Let all, then, who have not yet made their Easter confession, approach the sacred tribunal of Penance without delay, and cleanse their souls from sin. Let them, for the future, ponder daily and seriously upon their last end, namely: that it is appointed for them once to die, and that they know not *where*, nor *when*, nor *how*; that after death, they must appear before a just God to render an account of all their thoughts, words, works, and omissions; and that according to the account they render, they shall enter either into the eternal joys of heaven, or go down into the everlasting torments of hell. Let them think of this frequently, and they shall never more sin against that merciful God who will be in the end their most just Judge.

Adam was made of the slime of the earth, and Eve of a rib of Adam; both facts remind us of our mortality. That Adam was made of the slime of the earth recalls to mind, that we are dust and shall return unto dust. "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return." (Gen. 3: 19.) God made Eve of a rib of Adam; at what time? We read: "The Lord cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and when he was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which he took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam." (Gen. 2: 21, 22.) God created the woman from the rib, not of the waking, but of the sleeping Adam. The sleep of Adam reminds us of death, and the name of Eve reminds us of life; for what is the sleep of Adam but a figure of death? Eve means the mother of the living. But if Eve means the mother of the living, my brethren, why was she created during that sleep of Adam which was the figure of death? What relation is there between the mother of the living and the figure of death? Tertullian explains this, saying: "Eve, which word means the mother of the living, was formed in the figure of death, so that we might learn, that the remembrance of death contributes very much towards leading a good and virtuous life."

Life is followed by death, and death, by eternity; hence, the Wise Man

says: "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." (Eccles. 12: 5.) He does not say simply and indefinitely "into the house of eternity," but "into the house of *his* eternity," that is, into the house of that eternity, which every one shall have merited by his individual life. There are, however, only two houses, two everlasting states: heaven and hell. Of the one, Jesus says: "In my Father's house there are many mansions;" (John 14: 2,) of the other, Job says: "Hell is my house." (Job 17: 13.) The doors of both houses stand open; into one of these two abiding-places each and every one of us shall ultimately go; all depends, my brethren, on the sort of life we lead; as our life, so our death; as death, so eternity! Either heaven or hell; we are at perfect liberty to choose the one or the other: "God left man in the hand of his own counsel. . . . Before man is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose, shall be given him." (Eccles. 14: 15-18.)

In conclusion, dear Christians, let us ask ourselves these four questions: First, "*How long have we lived?*" Long or short, the dread responsibility of a Christian lies upon our souls, and hence, we must ask ourselves secondly, with earnest sincerity: "*How have we lived?*" Either well or ill; *if well*, let us return thanks to God and strive to persevere to the end in the paths of virtue; *if ill*, it is time for us to do penance, and appease God's anger and indignation. "*How long will we live yet?*" I do not know, you do not know,—God, alone, knows; perhaps our time will expire sooner than we expect. "*How will we live from henceforth?*" We know the way which God has pointed out to us, my brethren; we know what we have to do in order to be saved. Let us, then, so live as to secure our vocation and election; let us keep the law, and the law will keep us. If we do so, then at the end of our life when conscience, that hidden, truthful monitor, interrogates us at the door of death: "*Whither goest thou?*" our joyful answer to the searching question will be: "We go, (praised be the divine mercy!) into a happy eternity where in company with all the Angels and Saints, we shall see and enjoy our Lord and God forever." Amen.

O. S. B.

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## ON THE SUBLIME PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER.

*“Ask, and you shall receive; that your joy may be full.” John 16: 24.*

Sometimes, we find our Blessed Lord recommending prayer, as it were, only as a matter of counsel. At such times, my dear brethren, he is not so much enforcing its obligation, as pointing out to us the great advantages which result from its practice. So, in the Gospel of this day, where he assures us that whatsoever we ask in his name, shall be granted to us, he advises as well as commands us to have recourse to him in prayer. We may ask, then, not only for what is essential to us, but for whatever concerns our greater good and perfection. But our divine Master repeatedly goes beyond the language of counsel, and issues precepts upon the duty of prayer. “Ask, and you shall receive,” (John 16: 24,) implies not merely a counsel; it is a command; it expresses a condition, which, if not complied with, or if deliberately violated, may prove fatal to our best interests. Our Lord expressly says that the reason why we do not receive, is because we have not complied with his command; that our poverty, in short, is the consequence of our disobedience.—It is to be hoped, my brethren, that you say some prayers every day, but do you seriously reflect on the excellence of the action which you perform when you engage in this holy exercise? Allow me, to-day, to direct your attention to three points, which, if considered with proper diligence, will give you the right idea of prayer.

Reflect, then, dear Christians, that prayer secures us

- I. *The honor of conversing with God;*
- II. *An unlimited permission to request whatever favor we desire; and*
- III. *A full assurance of obtaining it.*

I. What can the world afford that is comparable to this privilege? Think within your souls what it is to converse with God, to hold intercourse with him whose sovereign majesty fills heaven and earth; who, by one word, made all creatures out of nothing, and whom the Angels never behold without being struck with dread and filled with admiration!

II. But if it be a singular honor to be allowed to address, when you please the King of Kings, the supreme Lord of heaven and earth,—what a happiness should you not deem it, to be perpetually empowered to present to him any request whatsoever, provided only it be consistent with his holy

law! A grant of such ample extent was never yet made by the most munificent prince to his most cherished favorite. This is the peculiar bounty of the Almighty. The infinite distance between his greatness and our littleness, his holiness and our sinfulness, and the infinite value of the grace we crave, so far from inclining him to forbid us his presence, rather induce him to be more urgent in pressing us to come to him. It is as if he feared lest the consciousness of our own want of merit should deter us from presenting our petitions; hence, the encouraging invitation of Christ: "*Ask, and you shall receive.*"

III. These words, my brethren, sufficiently indicate, that, since God encourages us to offer him whatever petitions we desire, his encouragement is accompanied with a full assurance of obtaining the purport of our request. A favor so extraordinary, by which humble prayer is enabled to withstand or even to vanquish the Almighty, could not, however, easily gain credit, were not Jesus Christ pleased to afford us incontrovertible proofs of this truth: "*Ask, and you shall receive;*" confirming this promise with an oath in these solemn terms: "*Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.*" Therefore, my brethren, in order to obtain, we must pray. Now, prayer is not only a noble exercise of the soul; it is, also, one of the conditions, one of the causes of our salvation. It is ordained by God that prayer should be necessary for all Christians who have come to the use of reason, both for the obtaining of life everlasting, (that gratuitous gift of God, for the securing of which he has an unquestionable right to establish the conditions;) as well as for the performance of those good works to which eternal life is promised. These good works are, *avoiding evil and doing good.*

The evil we must avoid is sin, which is incompatible with the felicity enjoyed by the Saints in a happy eternity. Nothing defiled can ever enter heaven. The good we must do, is the practice of the several virtues which merit everlasting life; and none of those virtues can be performed without the grace of God. The grace of God, dear Christians, is usually not obtained but by prayer. In order to avoid evil, we must engage with mighty enemies, who are ever bent upon our ruin, and wage a perpetual war against us. We must resist *the devil*, that determined adversary of man, who seeks all possible occasions to draw us into sin, and into eternal damnation. We must fight against *the flesh*, that domestic foe, that enemy within the walls, which, as the confederate of Satan, is always on the watch to betray us into his hands. We must beware of *the world*, which studies to impose upon us by false maxims, and to decoy us by stratagems into its manifold snares. The exertions of these our common enemies are so indefatigable, that we are not secure one moment without the support of the grace of God. Hence, as prayer is the usual channel through which the divine succors are conveyed, we are exhorted by our Redeemer to be

earnest in imploring the divine protection: "Watch ye, and pray that you enter not into temptation." (Mark. 14: 38.)

Divine grace is not less necessary for performing good works than for avoiding evil. We are not able to entertain even one good thought, conducive to our eternal happiness, unless the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our understanding to discern its truth, and efficaciously move our will to embrace it. It is impossible for us, my brethren, to believe in God, or love him as we ought, impossible for us to conceive a true repentance for our sins, unless the preventing grace of the Holy Ghost attract us to his service. This is the decision of the Church. (Conc. Trid., Sess. 2, can. 3.) This is, also, the doctrine of the Apostle: "We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God." (2. Cor. 3: 5.) The more, then, we need the grace of God, the more necessary is prayer. For though our Lord is ever ready to afford us all needful assistance, he wills that we should ask for it:—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened," (Matt. 7: 7, 8); yet, no promise is made to those who neglect to comply with these, his express injunctions.

That prayer may be acceptable to God, however, it must be accompanied with certain conditions:

1. *Attention,*
2. *Devotion,*
3. *Perseverance.*

1. The first condition, dear Christians, is *attention*. Without attention, all prayer of the lips is but a shadow of prayer; it is but mocking God. True prayer is "a cry of the heart." (St. Augustine.) St. Thomas of Aquin distinguishes three kinds of attention: one to the words, when we take care neither to suppress words, nor to clip or mumble them, but to articulate every sentence entire; another, to the sense or meaning of the words; and a third, to God whom we accost, and to the subject whereof we intend to speak to him. The second kind of attention not being in the power of those who do not understand the words which they pronounce, the first and third may suffice. But, "it cannot be expected God will listen to our prayer, when we do not attend to it ourselves," says the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine.

Yet, something must be allowed to human weakness. The mind of man in its present state, being surrounded with terrestrial objects, cannot easily raise itself to those which are spiritual; and when it does apply its thoughts to spiritual things, it is soon called off by the involuntary distractions which present themselves to the memory or imagination. It can-

not, therefore, be required of a Christian that, while at prayer, he keep his attention perpetually fixed. When he begins to pray, let him remind himself of the presence of God, to whom he speaks, and of the matter which he proposes to make the subject of his prayer, (repenting of that immoderate dissipation to which he may have, heretofore, given himself;) then let him recall his thoughts whenever he perceives them wandering, placing himself repeatedly in God's presence, and he need not be apprehensive on account of the distractions which trouble him; since they are all involuntary, they neither offend God, nor lessen the merit of his prayer.

2. *Devotion* is a certain condition of prayer not less necessary than attention. Every one esteems this characteristic of pious intercourse with God, though few know in what it really consists. True devotion is that disposition of the heart, which makes us perform with affection and fervor all actions that belong to the service of God. It is related of the people of Israel, that they "offered first fruit to the Lord with a devout mind," (Exod. 35: 21); and that, when God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, "all, both men and women, with devout mind, offered gifts." (Exod. 35: 29.) If these rich offerings could not please God without the zealous fervency, the heartfelt devotion of his chosen people, what is there, my brethren, that could please him without devotion? What is there in prayer that could be so acceptable to God, as to merit the divine favors, unless the Christian's heart were dedicated to God by the ardor of devotion? The devotion, here spoken of, is not confined to that sanctimonious composure of the exterior, which lifts up the eyes, wrings the hands, bends the knees, or throws the body prostrate upon the ground. Devotion is chiefly in the heart, and comprises three pious acts: *a respect for the divine majesty; an humble acknowledgment of the wants of the soul; and an earnest desire to be assisted by the goodness of God.*

Exterior devotion is often mimicked by the pious groans and godly gesticulations of the hypocrite. While true interior devotion does not condemn or forego those outward demonstrations which proceed from the abundance of the heart, or which contribute to affect the soul; at the same time, it seeks retirement in the use of uncommon gestures. In public, it shuns all singularity, and avoids every thing, in fact, which might tend to produce vain glory, or bring devotion into disrepute. It has a horror of all indecent lolling, gazing, or prattling, is fond of an humble posture, and a modest comportment, and manifests by every outward act and gesture that the heart is full of the reverential worship which it offers to its God.

It cannot be doubted that mortal sin is a great obstacle to the effects of prayer; since a person in the state of grievous sin is unworthy of God's favors. So long as he cherishes an affection for his sin, so long as he remains wilfully and with satisfaction, an enemy of God, and "turneth away his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination to

the Most High." (Prov. 28: 9.) But the moment the sinner humbles himself, and desires to be converted,—that very instant his "prayer shall pierce the clouds." (Eccles. 35: 21.) The publican, mentioned in the Gospel, was a sinner, when he went up into the temple to pray; but he implored the divine mercy, pierced to the heart with sorrow for his iniquities; and his prayer was so agreeable to God, that "he went down to his house justified." (Luke 18: 14.) He is the model and the encouragement, my brethren, of repentant sinners.

We need not wonder that prayer should be so efficacious a means of drawing down upon us the benedictions of heaven, when we reflect that every favor we obtain by prayer is granted, not so much to us as to Christ, not so much for our sake, as for the sake of Christ. It was to this end that our Blessed Lord gave such an explicit direction, namely, that all our requests should be presented in his name: "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you." But there are people, my brethren, who, praying in the name of Christ, petition for things which are highly detrimental to their salvation. Such persons insult and offend their Saviour, instead of making him their Mediator. Nor do these Christians properly correspond with their Redeemer's injunction to pray in his name, who are ever anxious to obtain temporal blessings, but are cold and indifferent when the question of their salvation is concerned. If they make vows, or pray with more than ordinary fervor, how often is it the case that they wish to be delivered from some temporal calamity, or to secure some worldly advantage for themselves or their children. A vow to give an alms, or to perform some other good work, in order to acquire chastity, humility, or any other virtue, or to escape some dangerous occasion of sin, is rare, indeed; although Christ gave his life to rescue us from sin, and to purchase for our souls the everlasting adornments of virtue.

Examine, if you please, my dear brethren, that model of all prayer, the *Our Father*, a prayer composed and taught by our Blessed Lord, himself. See there, how many of the petitions concern spiritual things; how few of them, temporal things. But we are not forbidden to pray for temporal things, as we are not forbidden to desire them. Our principal reason for desiring them, however, should be, that we may make them conducive to the glory of God, and our own eternal salvation. How criminal would it be, to make the grace of God subservient to the attainment of any temporal good, however precious! If we, indeed, ask for such delusive possessions, it should certainly be, dear Christians, with a certain degree of apprehension, lest they should prove the cause of our spiritual ruin. "When you pray for the things of this world, leave the granting or the refusing of your request to God, the physician of your soul, who knows best how to distinguish the medicine from the poison." (St. Augustine.) Adhere firmly to the rule of Christ: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his justice; and all these (temporal) things shall be added unto you," (Matt. 7: 7);

believing submissively that they will be granted you so far as they may be conducive to your eternal welfare.

3. If perseverance gives an additional value to all good actions, my brethren, this is far more particularly true of prayer,—prayer being a duty of paramount importance. On this account, our dear Lord, in exhorting us to pray, makes use of the terms *seeking* and *knocking*; because, when a person seeks what he has lost, he does not give over his search until he has found it; and the more precious the missing article, the longer and more zealous the search. Or if, like a beggar, he knocks at the door which remains shut against him, he persists in knocking and knocking until it is opened to him, and all the more if his need and hunger are extreme. On this account, also, Christ reminds us that a person may sometimes wrest from his friend by the importunity of perseverance, favors not granted to the simple claims of affection. The Almighty, though willing to make us partake of his blessings in due time, does not always impart the tokens of his kindness as soon as we desire; perhaps, he gives us patience to support our afflictions, whilst he defers removing the afflictions themselves. Thus he acted with St. Paul; instead of withdrawing from him many harassing and humiliating temptations, he bestowed upon him the shield of fortifying grace, which enabled him to stand victorious amidst all the assaults of Satan. “He acts like a good physician, who rather prescribes according to the nature of the disease, than according to the inclination of the patient.” (St. Augustine in Ps. XII.)

It is our duty to pray, my brethren; it is wholesome for body and soul, and absolutely necessary for our salvation. Follow, then, the exhortation of the Apostle of the Gentiles: “Pray without ceasing.” (1. Thess. 5: 17.) Never forget to pray in the morning and in the evening. As you do not forget to take your breakfast and supper, so do not neglect your morning and evening prayer. As the body needs food, so does the soul; and the food of the soul is prayer. Pray with attention, devotion, and perseverance; and in the sacred name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you may obtain, what you desire,—grace in this life, and eternal glory in the next. Amen.

G.

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## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## ON PRAYER.

*“Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.” St. John 16: 23.*

Our blessed Lord, my dear brethren, could not have exhorted us to pray in a more touching manner, than he did in this day's Gospel. He promises to grant our petitions, if we pray in his name, confiding in his merits. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. (Matt. 7: 7, 8.) And if our petitions are not always granted, it is, as St. James says, because we pray amiss:—“You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss.” (James 4: 3.) How, then, must we pray, dear Christians, in order that our prayer may be heard? Jesus, himself, in his Sermon on the Mount instructs us how to pray.

I. “*When you pray,*” says that divine Lord, “*you shall not be as the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will reward thee.*” (Matt. 6: 5-6.) As the Pharisees in all their good works, sought not so much to please God as to be praised by men, so, also, in their prayer. Hence, they selected public places to pray. Sometimes they showed themselves in the synagogues before a large assembly; at other times, in the public thoroughfares, when many people were passing, and where they could be observed by all. There they raised their hands and eyes to heaven, and with the most solemn deportment, with all that sanctimonious decorum which their hypocrisy could so well assume, they poured forth verbose and long-winded prayers. For this they were praised and admired by those who knew not the corruption of their interior; but they were severely repreahended by Jesus, who said: “*When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber.*” The chamber is our own heart, and this chamber we carry with us everywhere, inasmuch as it is within us. “*The kingdom of God is within you.*”

In the hour of prayer, my beloved brethren, we should endeavor to resemble a hermit, who lives not in the bustle of the world, but in retirement, in a lonely little cell. This cell is our heart. After admonishing us

to enter it, Jesus further instructs us to "*shut the door*". It avails us little to go into our chamber, if the door is left open. Thieves finding the door of a house open, immediately go in and steal. In like manner, that arch-robb<sup>er</sup> and enemy of our souls, the devil, finding the door of our heart open, enters at once and endeavors to deprive us of good works by sin, or at least to lessen our merits. This is the reason why we say our prayers so thoughtlessly and with so much distraction. We enter into the chamber, it is true, but we neglect to shut the door. The devil is impudent enough to knock at the door even when it is closed on him. What, then, will he not do, if he finds the door wide open for his entrance? He will deprive us of the precious treasure of divine grace, and hence, of all our merits.

It is a special grace, my brethren, that we are allowed to pray. As often as we pray, heaven is opened, we are surrounded by Angels, and are placed, as it were, in the midst of them. By prayer, we converse with God. What a privilege, what an honor! We have unlimited permission to request whatever favor we desire, with a full assurance of obtaining it, provided always that the object of our prayer be pleasing to God; that we pray with entire confidence in him, and with pure heart and lips. Furthermore, dear brethren, our prayer must be accompanied with good works.

"*When thou shalt pray*," says our divine Lord, "*enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret*." Some men in the perverseness of their hearts, pretending to explain these words, say, that churches are not necessary, and that every one may pray at home, or under the open canopy of heaven, in the woods or in the fields; since Nature is God's temple, where everything inspires us with devotion. I admit, my dear friends, that you can pray everywhere. Nay, I say still more,—you *must* pray everywhere. But, at the same time, you *must* not neglect your duty of going to church on certain appointed days. And this for several reasons; first, you are bound to worship God and to profess your faith before men, for Jesus says: "*Whosoever shall confess me before men, I will, also, confess him before my Father, who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 10: 32.) He, himself, with his holy parents, Mary and Joseph, not satisfied with adoring God and praying to him at home in the retirement of Nazareth, attended sedulously to those requirements of the law which obliged all the chosen people to worship publicly in the temple at certain seasons of the year. St. Luke assures us that they, (the Holy Family,) "*went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the pasch.*" (Luke 2: 41.) Secondly, it is your duty to edify your neighbor, and to give a good example. "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matt. 5: 16.) Do you call it edifying your neighbor, when you do not go to church? Is not this rather giving him scandal? You say, you pray at home! It is hard to believe it, for it is only too probable, that he who does not go to church, does not pray at home. Thirdly, even suppose, you *do* pray at home; your prayer will not

have the same effect as when offered in church; for, at home, you pray separated from your brethren. You well know by experience, my brethren, that natural forces, when divided, do not avail as much as when united. It is a temptation of the devil to believe, that you can pray better at home than in the church. In the church, our Lord Jesus Christ is really present in the blessed Sacrament of the altar, his true Body and Blood, his soul and his divinity;—will he not, then, in that, his actual abiding-place, hear our prayers more quickly and grant our petitions more readily, than when at home or in the open air, we appeal to him in his essence, simply as the omnipresent and omniscient God? In the church, moreover, the whole congregation fold their hands in supplication; hundreds are prostrate on their knees adoring the Most High. Will this, too, make no impression on you? Do you, alone, remain unmoved and feel nothing, where hundreds, full of sweet devotion, adore God in spirit and truth? If your prayer unite itself with that of your brethren, do you not believe that it gains strength, and is more apt to pierce the clouds? Do you not know that among men a petition, signed and presented by many, avails more than that which bears only the name of a single individual? With God it is the same; for Jesus says: “Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18: 20.) Hereby, he teaches us, that the prayers of assembled Christians, few or many, have more power to attract him and secure his countenance, than those of a single individual. Now, if Jesus is in the midst of two or three, how much more, my beloved, will he be present to a whole congregation? The Church unites her prayers with those of her children. The Church, our mother, is the spouse of Jesus Christ; and he so loves his Church, says St. Paul, “that he delivered himself up for it.” (Ephes. 5: 25.) Do you believe that Jesus will now refuse the request of that divine Spouse? Behold, with what power your prayer at church ascends to the throne of God!

II. Jesus proceeds to say: “*When you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens do; for they think that they are heard for their much speaking. Be not you, therefore, like them, for your Father knoweth what you stand in need of, before you ask him.*” (Matt. 6: 7, 8.) Be careful not to misunderstand these words, and do not infer from them, that Christ forbids us to spend a great deal of time in prayer. We must not stick to the letter of the law, dear brethren, but enter into the spirit of our Lord’s precious words. The heathens, as is well known, indulged the most absurd fancies about their false deities. They imagined them to be far off, or asleep, or engaged in common-place pursuits. Hence, they thought they had to cry loud and long, to attract the attention of the gods to their prayers, or to rouse them from sleep. They raged like madmen at their prayers; beat their breast with their fists; fell on the ground, or wounded themselves with sharp instruments. “Cry with a louder voice,” said the prophet Elias when

he taunted in jest the false prophets of Baal: "for he is a god; and perhaps he is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey; or, perhaps, he is asleep, and must be awaked. So they cried with a loud voice," adds the Sacred Text, "and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till they were all covered with blood." (3 Kings 18: 27, 28.) Others believed that the gods knew nothing of their necessities, and that they had to be told of them by many words. We, also, know from history, how impious their prayers frequently were. This is what Jesus reprehends. Hence, it is not long prayers in themselves that must be rejected, but the superstitious belief that a multitude of words constitute the entire essence and efficacy of prayer. Jesus, himself, prayed for hours, and often during the whole night. The Apostle exhorts us to be "instant in prayer"; to "pray without ceasing"; to "pray and faint not". Following the Apostle, I repeat: Pray much and frequently, my dear brethren, but unlike the heathens, pray more with the heart than with the tongue. Speaking and praying are two different things. True prayer consists not in an abundance of words. An humble and contrite heart speaks but little; it is too full of confusion and self-abasement to say much. How often is it not the case, that the more one speaks, the less he prays! Empty words which proceed not from the heart, cannot be called prayer.

But we are so weak, that we usually invert the divine order of things. We generally begin to pray with the lips, and by that means seek to introduce devotion into our hearts. To this end we make use of a prayerbook; but after all, dear friends, what are prayerbooks but merely helps to our weakness and manifold distractions? He who has the right use of his limbs, walks erect and with ease; the cripple has to walk with crutches. If that which you read in the prayerbook, does not become interior, does not enter thoroughly into your heart,—though you were to read printed prayers all day and all night, and every day and every night,—you pray in vain. Prayer of that sort is nothing more than a dry and inattentive reading, and our repeated distractions arise from three sources:

1. *From ourselves.* We are frequently the cause of our own distractions, and, then, they are sinful. Whatever we sow, that we shall reap. If our whole time and attention are taken up with thoughts of this world and its vanities, and if, thereby, we sow in our hearts the seeds of innumerable attachments, little wonder is it that we are distracted in our prayers. In order, then, my brethren, to avoid such distractions, be more recollected during the day, shut the door of your senses, and do not allow your thoughts to be wandering afar off.

2. Our distractions are frequently caused *by the devil*, who bears a deadly hatred against prayer. He employs all his artifices to disturb us in our intercourse with God; and thus it happens, that during prayer we experience

more temptations, than at any other time. Indeed, sometimes, we have no sooner placed ourselves in the presence of God, than we find ourselves overwhelmed by swarms of thoughts which are so extravagant, so evil, that it appears as if we had commenced to pray only for the sake of being tormented by every disgusting illusion of the imagination. The devil is the cause of this; knowing what power there is in prayer, and how mighty a weapon it is against his assaults, he acts with us as Holofernes did with Bethulia, when the latter resisted the siege of the Assyrians. He cut off the aqueduct which supplied the city with water, and stationed guards at the springs, hoping by that means to compel the inhabitants to surrender. In like manner, my dear brethren, the devil strives to obstruct the channel through which grace is conveyed to our souls. "Whom resist ye, strong in faith," says the holy Apostle St. Peter;—adding a little further on the consoling words: "the God of all grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, when you have suffered a little, will himself perfect, and confirm, and establish you." (1. St. Peter 5: 9, 10.)

3. Our distractions have sometimes their origin *in our own weakness*, for we are so frail, my brethren, that we sometimes cannot say even the *Lord's Prayer* with proper attention. If this be the case, we may, at least, bewail our weakness, and cry out to the Lord for relief, placing ourselves repeatedly in his presence, by acts of the will, and by earnest endeavors to control our wandering imagination, succeed in praying meritoriously, if not to our own satisfaction.

From these words of Christ: "*Your Father knoweth what you stand in need of before you ask him*," wicked men try to prove that prayer is not necessary. "What is the use of praying," they say, "since God already knows all our necessities?" Alas! how sedulously the sinner strives to blind himself! God, indeed, knows all our necessities before we present them to him; he knew them, in fact, before we experienced them; for with him there is no future, and a thousand years are to him as yesterday. Yet, he desires us to make known to him all our wants, and appeal to him for relief. The Infinite Wisdom does everything according to an established order. Now, our heavenly Father has ordained from eternity, that he will be gracious to all who call upon him in the hour of need. This, his will, he has made known to us, when he said: "Ask and you shall receive!" To despise his appointed means, and yet to expect help from him, is to invert his established order, and to rebel against his authority. Again, my dear brethren, if we wish to arrive at a certain destination, we must place ourselves in the road that leads there, and constantly pursue it to the end. Now, the road which leads to the heart of God, is prayer. He who does not pray, will not find help. What would you think of a beggar whom you had stopped upon the roadside, with the promise that, as soon as he invoked your aid in any emergency, you would forthwith help him out of

every difficulty, what would you think, if he were too lazy to come to you in his future need, and if he said coolly and insolently: "If that man wants to give me any assistance, let him come himself and bring me his gifts. I am not going to run after him, begging him for his favors!"

Man is that impudent beggar, if without prayer, he hopes for help from God. Jesus Christ condescends to hear our prayer, and promises to grant whatsoever we ask in his name: "*If you shall ask me anything in my name, that I will do.*" (John 14: 14.) God is willing to help us, dear Christians, as often as we ask in the name of Jesus, and in a becoming manner.

If you wish to pour wine into a vessel, you must see first, that the vessel is sound and in good condition; if the glass is cracked, if the pitcher is broken, if the barrel is without a bottom, you will lose all that excellent liquor which you have poured in. Now, God wills not the waste or abuse of his gifts; on the contrary, he desires that they be received in a good and perfect heart and that they bear fruit in season. We see this in the parable of the sower and the seed, as well as in that of the talents entrusted by the master to his servants. God is ever ready and willing to give us his gifts, but our souls, alas! are seldom in the proper condition to receive them.

In conclusion, my dear brethren, let us follow the advice of St. Paul: "Be instant in prayer;" (Rom. 12: 12,) for prayer is the key which unlocks the treasury of heaven; it is the golden channel through which the grace of God flows into our souls; it is that mysterious magnet which draws down upon us all the graces of heaven, and which even God himself cannot withstand. "While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odor thereof." (Cant. 1: 11.) If the humble spikenard of your prayer sends forth continually its sweet perfumes to heaven, the King of kings will descend from his celestial throne to repose in your hearts. If you pray with attention, devotion, and perseverance, you will experience the mercy of God and the truth of his consoling promise: "Whatsoever you shall ask of the Father, in my name, he will give it you." (John 15: 16.) Amen.

O. S. B.

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## ASCENSION DAY.

## THE ASCENSION.

*“And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken unto them, was taken up into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God.” Mark. 16: 19.*

The feast of the Ascension, my dearly beloved, is one of the most ancient in the Church, dating back to the earliest ages of Christianity. St. Augustine ascribes its introduction to the Apostles; for it is but natural to suppose that they should have annually celebrated the day on which they saw their Lord and Master ascend into heaven. Since the period when St. Helena built a magnificent church on the sacred spot whence Christ ascended into heaven, this feast has been celebrated with the greatest solemnity. On this day, the Easter candle is extinguished after the Gospel of the high Mass. The Easter candle symbolizes the risen Saviour. Burning it for forty days at high Mass on Sundays, signifies that Jesus Christ, the true Light of the world, remained upon earth forty days after his Resurrection, and often appeared to his disciples. The extinction of it on this day, reminds us that Christ, at his Ascension, withdrew his visible presence from us. We shall, to-day, dear brethren, consider a few circumstances of the Ascension of Christ, by answering four questions:

- I. *When,*
- II. *Where,*
- III. *How, and*
- IV. *Why did Christ ascend into heaven?*

I. Christ ascended into heaven forty days after his Resurrection.

1. Our Saviour remained upon earth these forty days, first, to convince his disciples of the reality of his Resurrection; and secondly, to give them the necessary instructions for their high mission. “He showed himself alive after his Passion, by many proofs, for forty days, appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1: 3.) Now, I would have you take notice, my dear Christians, that the number *forty* is a significant one.

Our Saviour spent *forty days in the desert* in order to prepare himself by prayer and fasting for his public life; again, he remained on earth *forty days* after his Resurrection, in order to ordain whatever was necessary for the welfare of his Church. During the forty days in the desert he prepared

himself for the work of our Redemption, and he spent the same number of days in order to apply to us, through the Church, the fruit of that Redemption. Let us recognize herein his love and solicitude, which made him ever intent upon our salvation, my brethren; but at the same time, let us, also, recognize our duty to be thankful to him, and to do everything that is required on our part, in order to appropriate to ourselves the fruit of Redemption.

The forty days which Christ spent upon earth after his Resurrection corresponded to the forty hours he remained in the grave. On this St. Thomas of Aquin remarks: "As Jesus Christ remained forty hours in the sepulchre as a proof of his real death, so he remained forty days on earth, as a proof of his new life." If Christ had raised himself to life immediately after his death, his death would have been considered doubtful; in like manner, his Resurrection could have been doubted, if, immediately after it, he had ascended into heaven. During the forty days that he remained on earth, after he arose from the dead, he frequently appeared to his Apostles and disciples, spoke and ate with them, allowed himself to be touched, in short, he showed himself to them as their living Lord and Master. Faith in his Resurrection being the foundation of our religion, Christ desired to establish it firmly by abiding those forty days with his disciples. The sojourn of the risen Saviour on earth for that period of time, is the firmest foundation of our faith, since it furnishes the proof that Jesus Christ is truly what he so often and so solemnly declared himself to be, the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. Finally, the forty days which Christ spent on earth after his Resurrection remind us of the *forty years* which the Israelites were obliged to spend in the desert, before they could enter the land of Canaan; they represent to us and symbolize the truth that we, although redeemed by Christ and freed from sin and hell, have yet to undergo a laborious and dangerous journey before we can enter the Promised Land of heaven.

2. *Christ ascended into heaven on a Thursday.* From Easter-Sunday until to-day, exactly forty days intervene, for which reason, the Church annually celebrates the feast of the Ascension on a Thursday. The Passion of our Saviour commenced on a Thursday, since it was on Holy Thursday that he sweat blood in the garden of Olives, was betrayed, and apprehended. And it was on a Thursday, that he entered into heaven. God wishes, thereby, to teach us, my brethren, that on the very day he sends us afflictions, he prepares for us our future glory. The day of our greatest humiliation may be the beginning of our greatest exaltation; yea, the beginning of our salvation. Among many thousands of Saints, see, for example, St. Ignatius of Loyola. He was a soldier, already nearly thirty years old, not wicked or corrupt, it is true, but very worldly-minded and ambitious. At the siege of Pampeluna, he was seriously wounded; his right leg being

shattered by a cannon ball. He lay sick for a long time, suffering great pain. In order to while away the time, he asked for romances and novels to read, but as there were none in the hospital, the Life of Christ, and the Lives of the Saints were handed to him. By the reading of these books, a thorough change was wrought in him; he resolved to dedicate himself entirely to God, and to become a soldier of Jesus Christ. In spite of all obstacles, he put his resolution into effect, established the Society of Jesus, accomplished an immense amount of good for the honor of God and the salvation of souls, and is now a great saint in heaven. Behold here, how the day on which Ignatius of Loyola was wounded, was for him the beginning of his sanctification and salvation. If he had met with no sufferings, doubtless he would have remained in the world. Therefore, if God visits you with afflictions, my brethren, accept them with patience, and employ them for the salvation of your souls. Consider the words of St. Augustine: "What you suffer is a remedy, not a punishment."

3. Christ ascended *at noon-time* into heaven, because as the sun reaches the height of his course at noon, so the Eternal Sun of Justice attained the height of his glory at the time of his ascension into heaven. In explanation of the words, (Ps. 54: 18): "Evening and morning, and at noon, I will speak and declare; and he shall hear my voice."—St. Augustine says: "In the evening I find the Lord on the cross; in the morning, at the Resurrection; and at noon, at the Ascension. In the evening I refer to the patience of the dying God-man; in the morning, to the life of the risen Saviour; and I pray that at noon, sitting at the right hand of God, he may hear me." And St. Prosper remarks: "In the evening the Lord dies on the cross; in the morning, he rises; at noon, he enters heaven, that the three parts of the day may be sanctified." This should, also, be a lesson to us to sanctify the three principal parts of the day, morning, noon, and evening, by prayer.

II. The place whence our Lord ascended into heaven is Mount Olivet, situated two thousand paces distant from Jerusalem. A valley lies between it and the city, through which the brook Cedron flows. It is so high that from its summit, one can overlook the city of Jerusalem.

I. Mount Olivet was a chosen mountain to our Lord Jesus Christ. There he passed whole nights in watching and praying; there he poured forth his soul in humble supplications on the eve of his Passion. By choosing this mount for the place of his Ascension, he teaches us that in order to be united with him in heaven, we must keep our eyes continually fixed on that blissful abode by fervent prayer. Indeed, after Baptism, my brethren, nothing is so necessary as prayer. Without prayer we cannot obtain the graces which we need to work out our salvation. If we are sinners, we need grace to be converted and reconciled to God; if we are

just, we also need grace in order to overcome our manifold temptations, grace to do good, and persevere in justice to the end. Hence, he who neglects prayer, shall assuredly perish. Beholding our Lord ascend from Mount Olivet remember, therefore, that this is the mount on which he was accustomed to pray with the utmost fervor and devotion; and do not fail to ascend daily, in your turn, the mountain of fervent and devout prayer.

2. Our Saviour commenced his Passion on Mount Olivet. On this day, dear Christians, he passed over the brook Cedron by the very same way, as on that mournful night when he was betrayed by his ungrateful disciple into the hands of his enemies. The mount of his Passion is the same as that of his Ascension, and we are thus reminded that, since Christ entered into his glory through suffering, the obligation is imposed upon all his followers to suffer with him. "We are joint heirs with Christ, yet, so if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him." (Rom. 8: 17.) Christ is our model, to whose blessed image we must all be conformed; as he had to suffer in order to enter into his glory, so there is no other way for us, dear Christians, to enter heaven than by the way of the cross. The rich man, who feasted sumptuously every day was buried in hell; and poor Lazarus who was full of sores and famished with hunger, was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom. (Luke 16: 22.) Accordingly, let us not expect to find our heaven on earth, but bear with patience the sufferings and tribulations of life, always seeking consolation in the words of the Apostle: "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with him." (Rom. 8: 17.)

III. *The manner of the Ascension* is thus described by the Evangelist: "And he led them out as far as to Bethania; and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And it came to pass, whilst he blessed them, that he departed from them, and was carried up to heaven." (Luke 24: 50, 51.) Christ blessed his disciples, not with pious wishes, but with a true and real blessing. In consequence of this benediction, the Apostles were protected from the contamination of the world; they preserved the unity of faith and the bond of charity; and after a glorious martyrdom, entered into the joy of their Lord. We partake of this divine blessing every day at Mass, through the ministry of the priesthood. At Mass, the memory of the Passion and death, the Resurrection and Ascension of our blessed Lord is renewed; it is at the close of the Mass, and in the person of the priest, that he stands again, as it were, on Mount Olivet, and repeats the blessing of Ascension Day. Who, then, would neglect to avail himself of this blessing? Who would fail to receive it with due reverence, confidence, and devotion?

Christ ascended into heaven by his own power. He was not alone, but surrounded by all the just of the Old Testament. "Ascending on high, he led captivity captive." (Eph. 4: 8.) Captive in the bonds of charity, he

led those souls that had been captives in Limbo, the Saints of the Old Law. At the sight of the heavenly Jerusalem, they must have exclaimed in an ecstasy of joy and admiration: "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord," (Ps. 83: 2); whilst the angelic choirs, meeting their incarnate God, hailed him, saying: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and benediction." (Apoc. 5: 12.)

IV. *Why did Christ ascend into heaven?* For his own sake, my brethren, and for our sake.

1. He ascended for his own sake. He celebrated his triumph that day, as conqueror of death and hell; and took possession of the crown prepared for him by his virtues and merits; he went to be rewarded for his obedience to the Father: "My food is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work." (John 4: 34.) To be rewarded for his humility, which induced him to be born in a stable and die on the cross; to be rewarded, in fine, for all his other virtues, for his meekness, patience, fervor in prayer, love of poverty, bounty, and compassion. If our heavenly Father rewards those who give even a drink of water in his name, his justice required that he should also reward his Eternal Son for so many sublime virtues. Therefore, Christ, himself, said to his heavenly Father: "I have glorified thee upon earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, glorify thou me, O Father, with thyself, with the glory which I had with thee, before the world was." (John 17: 4, 5.) Verily, for his obedience unto the death of the cross, "God hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and in hell; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2: 9-11.)

2. Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, also, for our sake. He opened the gates of heaven for us which, heretofore, had been closed even to the just. "In my Father's house there are many mansions \* \* \* I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am, you also may be." (John 14: 2, 3.) If we follow faithfully the Son of God, my brethren, he will say to his Eternal Father: "Father, I will that where I am, they, also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me; that they may see my glory." (John 17: 24.) "Where I am, there also shall my minister be."—Great as our frailty may be, the presence of our divine Elder Brother encourages our hope. "God, who is rich in mercy \* \* \* hath quickened us together in Christ, and hath raised us up together; and has made us sit together in the heavenly places, in

Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2: 4-6.) We possess two particular pledges of our hope: the first is, that in Christ, God descended upon earth. Is it not a greater wonder for a king to enter the hut of his servant, than for the servant to be admitted into the palace of the king? The second is, that our human nature, our flesh, ascended, to-day, into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. Do we not pray every day in the Mass, dear Christians, that, by the mystery of the altar, "we may be made partakers of his divinity, who vouchsafed to become partaker of our humanity?"

Our hope should increase by reflecting that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven to be our advocate and intercessor. He is our High-Priest, "always living to make intercession for us." (Heb. 7: 25.) He, himself, assures us that he will ask the Father to grant us his Holy Spirit. "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever." (John 14: 16.) Though we may have sinned most grievously, we shall find grace and mercy through Jesus, if we sincerely repent of our trespasses: "My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just, and he is the propitiation for our sins." (1. John 2: 1.) Finally, our divine Lord ascended into heaven to induce us to lift up the eyes of our spirit, and the desire of our hearts towards heaven. "Seek the things that are above; where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God." (Col. 3: 1.) Remember the poor leper who was found by the huntsman, singing in the forest, and who declared that his cheerfulness increased as his dreadful malady grew worse, because he saw, thereby, the coveted possession of heaven draw nearer and nearer.

In conclusion, dear brethren, let us manifest our gratitude by firmly clinging to Jesus Christ and his Church in this age of infidelity. We have no lasting city here, but seek one to come. Heaven is our home; there is only one way leading to it: the way of the cross and of Christian self-denial. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. 16: 24.) Millions have gone before us in that sacred, thorny path; and what others have done, we also can do, if we only have the will. "Where there is a will, there is always a way;" and each one of us, my brethren, can exclaim with St. Paul in the generous confidence of true Christian humility: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4: 13.) Amen.

J. E. ZOLLNER.

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## ASCENSION DAY.

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CHRIST'S ASCENSION A LESSON AND A WARNING TO SINNERS.

*“While they looked on, he was raised up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” Acts 1: 9.*

Jesus Christ came upon earth to redeem mankind; he came, my brethren, to open to us those golden gates of heaven, which the sin of our first parents had forever closed against us. He could have freed us from the slavery of sin by his word only; his lightest breath would have sufficed to restore to us the grace which we had forfeited by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. He created the world out of nothing by his word only,—by a single act of his all-powerful will; in like manner, he could have redeemed us by his word only. But this he would not do; he desired to show his great love for us, and hence, he assumed human nature, my brethren; he became one of us, he suffered and died for us. Moreover, after suffering the greatest ignominies for thirty-three years, after treading, at the last, the royal way of the Cross, and marking out for us with bloody footprints, the path of salvation,—he returns on this day, as conqueror of sin, death and hell into the glory of his Eternal Father. He gives, in short, to his faithful followers and disciples on this festival, a consoling proof, that “our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.” (2. Cor. 4: 17.) If we follow his footsteps in true penance, in fidelity and purity of heart, my brethren, we may firmly hope, that whither the Head is gone, the members shall, also, follow; that is, into the blessed mansions of everlasting bliss.

But sinners, you may say, cannot feed on this hope? Yes, penitent sinners may draw sweet consolation from this festival, if, after having laid hands on the plow, they look not back to the forsaken paths of iniquity. But those who deliberately follow their sinful desires, who, step by step, approach nearer to their eternal destruction,—instead of being able to console themselves on Ascension Day, have a thousand reasons to be filled with consternation and horror. Alas! I am well aware that this gives them little or no trouble at present, but their eyes will be opened when they shall find themselves at the end of their journey. “There is a way that appeareth right to man, but the ends thereof are death.” What they shall clearly see at the hour of death, I will foretell to them this day; and hence, I propose to the consideration of all unrepentant souls three points of paramount importance:

- I. The ways of the sinner, considered in their beginning, are deceitful;*
- II. The ways of the sinner, considered in their progress, are difficult;*
- III. The ways of the sinner, considered in their end, are destructive.*

I. The first sin came into the world by deception; if our common mother Eve, (the first deceived and deceiving woman,) had not considered evil to be good, she would not have entailed upon her posterity so much misery and affliction. That Eve considered the forbidden fruit fair to the eye, and doubtless, delightful to the scent, that, I say, might be forgiven her, but how could she believe, or rather, how could she so deceive herself as to think that it was also good to eat? She had heard God say, that it was *not* good to eat; that it was poisonous; that she would die, if she ate thereof. But she looked at it again and again. She trifled with the temptation, my brethren; and, fancying that it was not only fair to the eye and delightful to the smell, but also good to eat, she stretched forth her hand, and seizing the forbidden fruit, immediately ate thereof. Thus, sin, my brethren, opened a way for itself by deception, in that fair, innocent world; and with the same ease, with which it found entrance into the heart of the guilty mother, it entered also the hearts of her unfortunate children.

Hear, how exactly the language as well as the error of the children agree with those of their mother; they say, as we read in the Book of Wisdom: “Come, and let us enjoy the good things that are present.” Their judgment being entirely perverted, they consider that to be good which is evil, and that evil which is good. If they took the maxims of religion for their guide, instead of their sinful desires; if they viewed the things of this world by the light of faith, they would adopt quite other thoughts. They would conclude: How can that be good, which alienates me from the grace of God, the greatest treasure I possess? How can that be good, which deprives me of my right and title to an eternal crown? How can that thought, that word, that deed be anything but evil, if, before the eyes of heaven, it makes me an object of ineffable scorn and hatred? Can it be expedient for me, *to turn my back upon my God*, (a God, who has my fate for this life and the next in his hands), in order to turn to the world, (and *that* a world, from which I cannot expect anything but ingratitude and woe?) Can it be good *to neglect the interests of the immortal soul*, and, at the same time, indulge that body which, in a short time, will rot in the grave and return into dust? Can it be good to give *the fleeting pleasures of this deceitful world* the preference before the imperishable riches of Paradise? But such salutary thoughts, alas! never enter the minds of sinners; they are so captivated by their errors, that they fancy they have found the right road to happiness, concluding, moreover, that those who do not follow in their footsteps, are surely in error. But they deceive themselves, my beloved brethren; for, like lunatics who imagine all men mad save themselves,—thinking others to be in error, these unhappy souls are themselves grievously

mistaken. I know not with whom to compare such people better, than with that Bishop of Laodicea, of whom the Book of Revelations speaks. "All goes well with me," he said; boasting of his happiness. "I am rich, and made wealthy, and I have need of nothing." But his pride was humbled to the dust by St. John who, by the command of God, wrote to him: "What, thou art rich, thou art happy? Ah, how much thou art mistaken! 'Thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? . . . . Anoint thy eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see'." (Apoc. 3: 17.)

Thus, St. John spoke to the self-deceived Bishop of Laodicea; and I do not hesitate to address the same words to all those who are following the same deceitful path. O sinner! you fancy you are fortunate, because all goes according to your wishes; because you are rich and wealthy, and have need of nothing! You imagine yourself happy, because you can give full scope to your passions! Ah, if you would but view your course by the light of faith, you would soon discover, unhappy souls, how far you are deviating from the road that leads to heaven! Alas! you are satisfied with your error, and hence, you do not endeavor, to free yourself from it; you know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; you continue your sinful ways, neglect your immortal souls, forget eternity! You do not believe at present that you are laboring under a false impression, but I assure you, that Death, the parent of true knowledge, will convince you, that you have deceived yourself like Eve. You will cry out in the end with the vast multitude of despairing souls, who will discover too late their fatal mistake: "We have erred from the way of truth; and the light of justice hath not shined unto us; and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us; we wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known." (Wisd. 5: 6. 7.)

II. *The ways of the sinner are hard.* A man who is the enemy of God declares in vain that his days are happy; for in reality, he has no true pleasure or comfort; his happiness is only imaginary. The ways of the sinner are sown with destruction and misery, since, as the Scripture says: "the wicked are like a raging sea which cannot rest;" and the reason is obvious; sin and peace never can be companions; there is no peace to the wicked. The way of peace, "the way of the Lord, they have not known." Peace of conscience is the greatest good mortal man can possess; for, let him be ever so rich, he is poor, if he be not at peace with himself. Now, the wicked are deprived of that treasure, my brethren; they endeavor, indeed, to find peace in earthly pleasures, honors, and possessions; they strive to silence the remorse of their conscience in the noisy amusements of the world. Sometimes, it is true, they may succeed in silencing it for a little while; but the stings which sin leaves behind in their consciences,

will surely assert themselves in the end, and cannot be allayed by the pursuit of earth's sweetest pleasures.

The tortures entailed on the wicked by the reproaches of conscience, are so painful and violent, that St. Bernard does not hesitate to compare them with hell-fire, saying: "The guilty conscience is like a hell." The keen anguish of a guilt-stained conscience may be truly compared to the pains of hell, since *it is a pain without remedy*. The sinner may run from pleasure to pleasure; his interior agony is not thereby mitigated. So long as he does not renounce his sinful ways, even his very enjoyments are embittered by intolerable stings. Furthermore, this suffering may be compared to the pains of hell, because *it is a pain which deprives all else of its proper relish*. Every mouthful of food that he eats, appears to the sinner to have an evil taste; sleep does not strengthen him; the remembrance of his sins which are continually before his eyes, makes him feel a disgust with everything about him. Finally, this ever-present anguish resembles the pains of hell, because *it gives him here on earth a foretaste of what he will have to suffer hereafter*, the torture of a worm that never dies, of a fire that will never be extinguished.

Is it not true, therefore, my brethren, that the sinner walks in hard and bitter ways, suffering a kind of hell-fire in his heart? Hence, Jeremiah said to the wicked people of Israel: "Know thou and see, that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God." Thou wouldest not have to suffer so much, hadst thou remained faithful to God. Impenitent sinners, (if there be any such here present,) open your eyes, I beseech you, and you, too, in your turn, know and see how bitter, how evil a thing it is to live at enmity with God! Daily experience teaches you, that so long as you remain in the state of sin, nothing in this world is able to console you; you are tortured and crucified by the stings of your own bad consciences. If you reflect upon the past, you are terrified by the remembrance of your many and enormous sins; if you think of the present, the anger and indignation of God fill you with trembling and fear; and if you look forward into the future, you behold hell awaiting you; you see yourself on the very brink of perdition. After all this, will you be bold enough to continue to walk through these hard ways of iniquity? You could live happy in communion with your God, but you prefer to flee from him into the dark abyss of shame and misery. O sinners, return to your God, the Source of all true felicity, and seeking, find in him that peace of your souls of which you have been so long deprived. Be converted to him with all your hearts in fasting, in weeping, and in mourning; and turn to the Lord, for he is gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive you. Follow in the footsteps of your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, whose glorious Ascension into heaven we solemnize this day; follow him in the exercise of holy penance all the days of your life; and if, at the end of your earthly career, my dear brethren, you are found conformable to the image of his suffering

and mortified life, you will be made partakers of his glory in the kingdom of heaven.

III. *The ways of the sinner lead in the end to destruction.* Let us for a moment suppose, my brethren, that all I have said to-day was false and exaggerated; that the ways of the sinner were neither deceitful nor hard, but smooth and delightful as passion depicts or the devil represents them to us; what would it avail us, after all, if they lead in the end to eternal perdition? We read in the book of Ecclesiasticus that the way of sinners is made plain with stones, but that in their end, there are darkness and hell and pains. What a miserable end! In their end are darkness and hell and pains;—there, in the centre of the kingdom of all unhappiness, the flowery road of the sinner will terminate. Again we read: “They spend their days in happiness and wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.” But I know, nevertheless, dear Christians, that sinners can scarcely be made believe these solemn truths. When they are told that the wicked, at the end of their life, will find themselves at the gate of an unhappy eternity, they imagine that such warnings are not meant for *them*; they do not believe that they belong to that unhappy class, since, (as they say,) they are neither thieves, nor robbers, nor murderers, nor drunkards; and they fondly hope, that only people of that description are included in the terrible prophecy of condemnation. But whosoever lays this flattering unction to his soul is grievously mistaken; and I hope a few words from the mouth of our blessed Redeemer himself, will be sufficient to convince them to the contrary. He says: “*Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and many there are who enter by it.*” Here, my brethren, you have the words of the Eternal Truth itself, and you surely cannot call them in question. “Many there are who enter by it.” Who are the many that enter by the wide gate into the broad road that leadeth to destruction? The Fathers of the Church say: “The greater part of adult people; not only those who live in open violation of the laws of God and his Church, but also those who believe that they have an excuse for their sins.” Shall we not say that those young women and young men enter by the wide gate and go down to hell, who, by too much familiarity, by a so-called friendship and cordiality, stain the purity of their hearts by a thousand evil thoughts? Shall we not say that those enter by the wide gate, who slander their neighbor? That those enter by it, who commit a mortal sin, without doing penance for it? Those who seem to be more concerned, because they are obliged to make their confession than they are for the sins they confess? Those who immediately, after receiving absolution, relapse without a struggle into their former sins, excusing themselves on the plea of their frailty and human weakness? In short, we are forced to say, dear brethren, that all those enter by that wide gate into the broad road of destruction, who commit mortal sin, saying at the same time: “We will do penance for it after a while and amend

our lives;" for experience teaches that, far from doing penance, far from returning to God, after their fall, by a perfect and sincere conversion, one sin draws another after it, till their multiplied iniquities become as a heavy chain which bind the unfortunate wretches hand and foot, and precipitate them finally into hell. The more the sinner becomes familiarized with sin, the more he will shut his ears and heart against the inspirations of grace, the sooner he will compel God by his repeated relapses to deprive him of the last saving grace; and thus it remains true, that the ways of the unjust lead in the end to destruction.

O, how foolish, then, are those, who walk the way that terminates in everlasting misery and ruin! Nevertheless, this is the path which the generality of Christians pursue. "Many there are who enter by it." Hear, my brethren, what Ezekiel says to them who work their damnation by going in the broad and flowery ways of vice: "Why will you die, O house of Israel?" Christians, why are you so heedless of the danger of losing your souls; why do you run headlong into perdition? Why will you die, O children of God? You were created by the Most High in order to reign with him in a felicity incomprehensible to human understanding; tell me, then, why will you consent to go into eternal slavery? Why will you die, O heirs of heaven? The way of salvation is open before you; why do you blindly choose the way of everlasting damnation? Why will you die? Turn, I beseech you, before it be too late, from the broad road that leads to hell, and enter on the narrow way of life; turn ye from your evil ways, and return to your God, who is calling you; who invites you to come to his embrace. He desires most ardently to conduct you to life everlasting. "As I live," saith the Lord, "I desire not the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Let us walk bravely and hopefully in the way that promises a good end. Let us never lose sight of the two great goals that await us at the gates of eternity, the one of salvation, the other of damnation. Of course, at the narrow gate, and in the strait way of salvation, we will meet with disappointments, sufferings, humiliations, and trials, but they, my brethren, will be for our correction and improvement. Remember that, as the way of virtue has never yet led any one to damnation, to hell; so the way of vice has never yet led any one to heaven. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear;" but if the unhappy and obstinate sinner persists in following the way of sin, and damning his miserable soul,—let us, at least, my beloved brethren, putting our trust in God, and obeying his divine commandments, pursue faithfully and perseveringly the narrow way of virtue, and earnestly endeavor to save our immortal souls. Amen.

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## ON THE ABOMINABLE VICE OF FALSEHOOD.

*“When the Paraclete shall come, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, he shall give testimony of me.” John 15: 26.*

The Holy Ghost, descending upon the Apostles in the Cenacle on the feast of Pentecost, was to them the veritable Spirit of truth, since he enlightened and strengthened them, so that they gave testimony to the truth and taught nothing but the truth. The Holy Ghost, my beloved brethren, should, also, be a Spirit of truth to *us*; we should love truth, and abhor and shun nothing more than falsehood and deceit. An untruth or lie should never proceed from the mouth of a Christian, whose heart was created to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth. But to our shame be it said, the vile vice of telling lies is widely spread among Christians. Parents tell lies, and their unhappy children follow their evil example; the rich and the poor, the high and the lowly, all are given to this pernicious practice; and I may say that there is hardly one among us, who would not lie, if he were to assert that he had never in his life told a lie. This is because people make little of falsehood, and look upon it either as no fault at all, or, at any rate, as a very excusable one. To enlighten your minds upon this point, my brethren, and to awaken in your hearts a horror and contempt for this despicable vice, I shall speak, to-day, on the heinousness and perniciousness of falsehood.

In the first place, then, dear Christians, to tell a lie, is to say what we believe to be untrue. If we believe that we are speaking the truth, and happen to be mistaken, it is not a lie; but if we say what we believe to be false, and it turns out to be true, is really a lie in the sight of God. All lies are sinful, because they are all directly opposed to the Spirit of Truth. “The holy spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful,” says the Wise Man. (Wis. 1: 5.) Moreover, they are *an abuse of that most excellent gift of speech* which God has given us to enable us to make our thoughts known to our fellow-men, whereas the liar uses his speech to conceal his thoughts and deceive his neighbor. But though all lies are sinful, they are not all equally so; some, my brethren, are much more grievous than others. *The worst lie of all is that which is told in Confession* by him who conceals a sin, for such a lie is a sacrilegious lie, a lie not told to man, (as St. Peter says,) but to the Holy Ghost; and hence, a profanation of a holy Sacrament. *The lie next in guilt* is that which is told to injure our neighbor’s character; for example, when a person gives false testimony in a

court of justice, or when he spreads abroad calumnies against his neighbor, accusing him of crimes which he has never committed. Such lies are called *malicious lies*, because they are told through malice, purposely to injure others; and they are very grievous sins. But there are other lies of less guilt in the sight of God; namely, *lies of excuse* and *lies of jest*. These are sometimes called by foolish people "*white lies*", as if that which is black in its very nature, could ever be made white for the satisfaction of the sinner. It is true, my brethren, those lesser falsehoods may not cause our neighbor any injury, but still they are displeasing to God, and hurtful to the soul. They displease God, because he is the Eternal Truth, and as the Scripture says: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." They are hurtful to the soul, not only on account of the wound which they inflict upon that noble image of God, but also because by repeated falsehoods, no matter how trivial, a habit of lying is formed which is the foundation of many vices. If a child is a habitual liar, depend upon it that if he is not corrected for this vice and cured of it in time, he will grow up both a hypocrite and a thief, and his unhappy parents will have cause to mourn his fate as a robber, or perhaps, a murderer. "Show me a liar," says the proverb, "and I will show you a thief."

Moreover, to tell *a lie of excuse* is an act of cowardice; it betrays a certain weakness of character and principle on the part of the prevaricator; and we may well fear that so feeble and timid a soul will soon fall a prey to its evil passions and to the temptations of the devil. Be always, then, most exact in speaking the truth, my dear brethren, and constantly pray to God to give you a great love of this excellent virtue, which is so pleasing in his sight. Remember, that if you love the truth and always speak it, you are in a special manner the children of God, who is divine Truth. On the contrary, if you have the wretched habit of lying, you are the children of the devil, who, as our Blessed Lord says, is a liar and the father of lies. It is not permitted or expedient to tell the smallest lie, even though it be to save the whole world; for it is better that the world should be destroyed than that God should be offended. Much less should you tell a lie to save yourself from a merited rebuke or reproof. If you have done wrong, my brethren, be sorry for it and acknowledge it with candor, and you will be speedily forgiven by both God and man, whereas if you try to hide your fault by a lie, you are guilty of a fresh sin, and one often much greater than the offence first committed. Weigh well the burden of the two lines of the English poet, George Herbert:

"Dare to be true, nothing can need a lie;  
The sin that needs it most, grows two thereby."

Yes, *dare to be true*. Be brave enough to speak the truth; for it is an act of true courage. Men will respect and trust you if you are sincere and candid; the Saints and Angels will look down upon you with approval;

God will hear, and will reward you. “*Nothing can need a lie,*” because nothing can excuse it. Moreover, the sin you have committed, the sin that seems to “*need it most,*” (as the poet says,) “*grows two thereby;*” since, by adding a lie to your first offence, you offend God doubly, and thus make it far more difficult to obtain his pardon. Furthermore, depend upon it, my brethren, sooner or later, the liar will be found out in his lies; the proverb says: “*Truth, (like murder,) will out.*” What is more contemptible than the character of a liar? What meaner or more despicable than to be regarded on all sides as a man whose word is never taken, whose denials are never believed, whose promises are never trusted? On the contrary, what is more noble, what more amiable, than the character of a man whose word is his bond, who is always known to be truthful, candid, and sincere in all his dealings with God and his fellow-man? Wherever such an individual goes, he carries with him the esteem, the confidence, and the respect of every one, yea, even of heretics and infidels.

I come now, dear Christians, to speak of calumny, by which we mean *a lie told to injure our neighbor's character.* It is sometimes malice, sometimes self-interest, which lead people into this sin; for example, a person may falsely accuse another of theft through spite and revenge; or he may do so to effect the loss of his situation, in order that he, himself, may step into his victim's place. In either case, the sin is very grievous; for, among all our temporal goods, there is nothing, except life itself, that we prize so highly, or that is of such inestimable value to us as our good name. Our means of subsistence, the peace and happiness of our lives, and frequently that of those who are dear to us, depend in a great measure upon our bearing an unblemished reputation. Hence, he who unjustly robs us of this, inflicts on us the greatest of injuries. To deprive us of our earthly goods, or to cause us some bodily injury, is generally a less evil than to blacken our character in the eyes of our fellow-men.

Another sin of this kind, my brethren, (and I may add, one of the most prevalent of all sins,) is *detraction.* This consists in taking away our neighbor's character by publishing his secret faults. You see it is a different thing from calumny, which we have already defined as telling positive lies against our neighbor. The detractor tells the truth when he reveals the occult faults and crimes of his neighbor. This we admit, but he has no right to publish it in such cases. Every one is entitled to his good name until he has forfeited it by some public crime. There are, however, certain cases in which it is our duty, my brethren, to make known the bad conduct of subordinates to their lawful superiors. For example, if we know that any boy or girl is keeping very bad company or going secretly to some dangerous place of amusement, it would not only be lawful, but it would be our duty, to make it known to the parents or guardians of the child, so that they might take measures to prevent the continuance of the evil. Silence in such a case would be a sin, for it might easily be the cause of

the eternal loss of a soul. But this is very different from the case of a detractor, who no sooner hears of the sin of another, than without any other motive, save his own vile malice or love of gossip, he hastens abroad with itching tongue to publish it. "Have you heard," he exclaims with uplifted hands and eyes: "have you heard what such a one has done? I would not have believed it; yet, I fear, it is only too true. Come, I will tell it you as a secret!" And so the *secret* goes about from one to another, until the poor victim of the detractor's malice has lost his good name forever in the esteem of all that know him.

Sometimes, the calumniator and detractor succeed in thus destroying the character of their neighbor without actually charging him with any crime; but simply by depreciating his good deeds, and artfully hinting that if people only knew as much about the person in question as *they* know, they would not long entertain the good opinion they have of him. "Oh," they will say with a significant shrug of the shoulders: "such a one, I fear, is not as good as he looks. For my part—I will say no more; the least said, the soonest mended!" And so their hearers go away with the false impression that the person under discussion, has been guilty of some secret crime, which the detractor is too good-natured to mention,—an error, by the way, which can never be removed, as no special sin has been laid to his charge. What can be meaner, more ungenerous, or more cruel than such conduct? It may well be compared to that of the midnight assassin who lurks under cover of darkness to stab an inoffensive and unsuspecting wayfarer. Of such, and of all detractors, the Holy Scripture truly says: "They have whetted their tongues like a sword," (Ps. 63: 4.) "Their words are smoother than oil, and the same are darts." (Ps. 54: 22.) And again: "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent, but the venom of asps is under their lips." (Ps. 169: 4.)

Another sin of the tongue, my brethren, is *backbiting*. The difference between this sin, and those of calumny and detraction is, that in backbiting, you do not tell lies of your neighbor, which would be calumny; neither do you publish his secret sins, which would be detraction; but you simply take pleasure in speaking of *his faults and failings which are known to every one*. Is there any harm in this?—you ask. Yes, certainly; for such a practice is contrary to Christian charity, which bids us love our neighbor as ourselves, and do to others for the love of Christ what we would wish them to do to us. Now, which of us, my dear brethren, would like our own faults to be made the subject of conversation? If we, in our turn, are passionate, untruthful, or greedy, do you think we should relish having these failings of ours discussed in our absence over the tea-table of a friend, or beside the fireside of an enemy; and all the lies we have told, all the passions we have indulged, as well as the many times we have eaten or drunk too much, brought up against us and freely talked about? Well, then, if we should not like it ourselves; it is plain that charity forbids us to do the

same to others. Yet, alas! how common is this vice among mankind! Seldom do people meet together in a social circle that the faults of their neighbors do not form the chief subject of their conversation; and well it is, if the gossips limit themselves to speaking of their neighbor's public faults, and do not fall into the still more grievous sins of detraction and calumny! Have a great horror, my dear Christians, of the mean and ungenerous vice of backbiting. If you find yourselves in certain companies where the faults of others are discussed, take no part in such conversation; on the contrary, discourage it as much as you can; begin to speak of something else, or, at least, show by your countenance, by your silence, that such remarks are highly offensive to you, according to the advice of the Wise Man: "By the sadness of the countenance, the mind of the offender is corrected." Happy, indeed, will you be when you come to die, if you possess within you the sweet and consoling assurance that throughout life you have carefully restrained your tongue from all uncharitable conversations.

But what is he bound to do, dear brethren, who has injured his neighbor by speaking ill of him? He who has injured his neighbor by speaking ill of him, *must make him satisfaction*, and restore him his good name as far as he can. As there is no pardon from God for those who have stolen their neighbor's goods, unless they make restitution thereof, even to the last farthing, so neither is there any forgiveness for those who have robbed their neighbor of what is still more precious than temporal goods, namely, his character, unless they make him satisfaction and restore his good name, as far as they are able. Whoever by false testimony, by calumny or detraction, has deprived his neighbor of the esteem, confidence and respect of his fellow-men, has inflicted upon him a grievous injury; and justice, therefore, requires, that he should do all in his power to repair the evil committed. To do this he must retract his false accusation, and retract it, too, in the presence of those before whom the calumny was uttered. Nay, more, if the falsehood has spread abroad and become public, the originator of it must retract in public. In every case he must see that those whom it has reached are informed that there is no ground whatever for the base charges that have been made.

But what must he do who has taken away his neighbor's good name by revealing is secret sin,—in other words, who has been guilty of detraction? It is clear that he cannot, like the calumniator, retract his words; inasmuch as he cannot declare a man innocent of a crime, of which he knows him to be really guilty. He must, however, do all that he can in accordance with truth to repair the injury he has inflicted. For example, he might seek occasion to make such excuses for the guilty persons as the case admits of; or, where opportunity offers, he might publish the unfortunate person's good deeds (as he has done his bad ones) and make known the most favorable points of his character. By doing this prudently and discreetly, he

may be able, in some degree, at least to remove the evil impression which his words have created, and to thus restore to him whom he has wronged, the good opinion of others.

This, however, is not all that the calumniator and detractor are bound to do in the way of making restitution. It may happen that the false charge which he has uttered, or the secret crime which he has revealed, has been the means of depriving the injured man of his business-employment, of his custom in trade, or of his means of subsistence. It may have caused him some serious loss or heavy expense. This, also, must be set right; the loss must be made good, and the injury repaired, as far as it is in the power of him who has inflicted it. See, then, my dear brethren, what an awful responsibility these sins of the tongue entail upon the soul! Watch, I beseech you, henceforth, over that unruly member, that no word may ever escape your lips which can, in any way, blacken the character or destroy the good name of your neighbor. And if ever you err in this respect through want of prudence or through bad feeling towards any one, hasten to recall your words at once before they are repeated to others, and before the injury has thus become too wide-spread and too deeply rooted for you to repair.

Speak the truth in all things, great and small; think kindly of your neighbor in your hearts, speak of him always with charity and forbearance, and guard his good name as you would your own. And "if there be contentions in your hearts," says St. James, "glory not, and be not liars against the truth;" but let each one of you, as the same apostle counsels: "show, by a good conversation his work in the meekness of wisdom." And may the God of all charity and truth grant to you, my brethren, that "wisdom which is from above, . . . . full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation." (James 3: 13-17.) Amen.

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## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AN EVIDENCE OF HER DIVINE ESTABLISHMENT.

*\*The hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth a service to God. John 16: 2.*

The sublime doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ, after he had ascended into heaven, could only be propagated by competent witnesses. To give testimony of Jesus, my beloved brethren, was the mission of the Apostles, and it is now no matter of speculation as to how they have fulfilled that mission, since the fact may be said to be as clear as the glory of the mid-day sun. Not only their contemporaries who had the happiness of seeing and hearing those messengers of peace, received their testimony, but we, also, my brethren, have, every day, the pleasure of hearing it. What else do the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists contain but the combined testimonies which they gave of Jesus? It cannot be denied, dear Christians, that they were most zealous in the cause of their Master; but what result would all their zeal have effected, if they had been left to themselves, if their testimony had not been supported by the testimony of the Holy Spirit? In the Gospel of this day, Jesus promised them the Holy Ghost, saying: "When the Paraclete shall come, whom I will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall give testimony of me." This promise has been gloriously fulfilled. It was in vain that the Jewish rulers and high priests grew jealous and imposed silence on the Apostles; for, full of the Holy Ghost, they knew not what it was to fear. Heedless of chains and prisons, they persisted in proclaiming the divinity of Christ Crucified, saying: "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5: 29.)

Miracles we must not expect in our days, my dear brethren, but a miracle greater than all the marvels wrought by the Apostles stands out in bold relief before our eyes; and, to-day, I invite you to contemplate with me this stupendous miracle, when I propose to your consideration the theme of my present discourse,—*the indestructibility of the Catholic Church*. Her perpetual existence is, indeed, a standing miracle. Or can it perhaps, be explained in a natural way, that the Catholic Church, so far removed from the time and place of her origin, not only exists, but is daily propagated and extended throughout the universe? When that holy Mother, the Church, was only four hundred years old, St. Augustine said that her existence was no less wonderful, than the creation of the world. What

would he say of her, to-day, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years? The history of the Catholic Church is the seal of her confirmation; by it, the Holy Ghost testifies that she is the Church of Jesus Christ, since she could not be destroyed

- I. By the cruelty of tyrants;*
- II. By the errors of heretics; nor*
- III. By the sandals of many of her own children.*

I. The Gospel of this day, in recording our blessed Lord's prophecy that the Apostles would soon be cast out of the synagogues, and cruelly put to death, intimates the persecution which they were destined, before long, to suffer at the hands of the Jews. The prediction was fulfilled to the letter. St. Stephen, the Protomartyr, spoke with such power before the Council; that no one could resist him; and when they could not reply to his arguments, nor prevail against his burning zeal, they had recourse to violence. Gnashing their teeth at him, and crying out with a loud voice, they rushed upon the holy deacon, and casting him out of the city, they stoned him. He fell a victim to their fury; and is honored as the first martyr of the Church. The Apostles, in their turn, after having been scourged, were charged not to speak any more of the Resurrection of Jesus. Herod killed St. James, the brother of John, with the sword, and seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to cast Peter, also, into prison. What the Lord had foretold to his disciples, "the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God," soon came to be literally fulfilled; and the Jews showed no quarter to the followers of Christ, until the vengeance of the Most High descended upon the guilty people, and their city and temple were destroyed.

But while these persecutions of the Christians were raging among the Jews, the Gospel was propagated among the Gentiles. The lives of the first Christians were spotless, and the sublimity of their sentiments; the purity of their morals, commanded the respect even of the heathens. But, when it was found that these singular people no longer offered sacrifices to the gods that, they came no more to make merry at their lascivious feasts,—the heathens were enraged at the insult offered to the false deities, and it was decreed in the council of the Roman emperors, (whose orders the whole known world obeyed,) that the red right arm of persecution must not rest, until every Christian had been banished from the face of the earth. It was counted the greatest crime, to be a follower of Christ; the severest punishment of the Roman laws were considered too mild even for the tenderest Christian maiden or the smallest Christian child; new tortures and new instruments of cruelty were invented for one and all of the disciples of Jesus. Nero, the brutal Emperor, ordered Christians to be wrapped in

the skins of wild beasts and worried by dogs; others by his command, were bound around with tunics, steeped in pitch, and being placed at certain intervals along the streets, were set on fire to illuminate the city of Rome. Others were mutilated and torn upon barbarous racks, and then, with bodies all covered with wounds, cast into dismal prisons, where they ended their lives in corporal misery and anguish. Nero died, but the spirit of cruelty and persecution descended to his hard-hearted successors. Again and again, were the cruel edicts renewed, and vast throngs of Christian confessors and martyrs entered by the gate of fierce and fiery torture into the joys of the Lord. And how long, (you ask,) did this storm of persecution rage? Half a century?—Ah! that were, indeed, a long time to be passed in blood and tears,—but it lasted still longer! For *three hundred years*, paganism endeavored with the fury of incarnate demons to destroy Christianity; until, at last, Constantine the Great embraced the Christian faith.

But the time of peace was short. Countless hordes of half civilized Saracens maddened by the ravings of Mahommed, broke forth from the plains of Asia into Christian Europe, and threatened destruction and ruin to all who would not abandon the doctrine of Christ. In their blind fanaticism, they would compel the whole world to receive the Koran in place of the Gospel, to exchange the Crescent for the Cross. The sword and the scimeter were the two-edged arguments with which these wild Mahomedans proved the truth of their religion. He who would not receive it, was doomed to death. It took centuries to drive them back. This was scarcely done, when wickedness and perfidy took up other arms against the faith of Christ. The infidels of France entered into a horrible conspiracy, whereby they agreed to give themselves no rest, until the last prince of the blood hung suspended by the entrails of the last priest of the Church. Upheld by those in power, they went so far as to abolish Christianity by law, and to adore a Lewd woman as the Goddess of Reason, in place of the true God. Tolerance was preached from the house-tops, but infidels, alone, enjoyed it; conscientious bishops and priests were maltreated and imprisoned, banished or beheaded. To administer or to receive a Sacrament was a terrible crime; churches were demolished, cemeteries were desecrated and profaned, and the Cross of the Redeemer trampled everywhere under foot.

With the most exquisite ingenuity and cruelty, the infidels of all times and climes have raged, in like manner, against the holy Catholic Church, but what has been the result? Thousands, nay, millions of Christians, have fallen victims to their fury, it is true, but thanks be to the Almighty God, their Mother, the Church, the divine spouse of Christ,—*they could not destroy*; the number of her children instead of decreasing was multiplied a hundred fold. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Pagan Rome fell; the fate which it intended for the Church of the crucified Saviour, overtook, in the end, its own proud, lustful sovereignty. Far

from perishing under the cruel scourge of persecution, the Catholic Church has outlived all the powerful enemies that have labored for centuries to destroy her. Rivers of blood were shed by the swords of the Turks; Christians were butchered; Churches destroyed; whole provinces were subjected to the sway of Mahommed, but *the Church could not be destroyed*. "They are dead, who sought the life of the Child," said the Angel to St. Joseph in Egypt. So we may say, my brethren, to comfort our souls in the Egypt of this miserable world: "They are dead that sought the life of his Church;" all have perished; powerful kingdoms and empires have disappeared; the Church, alone, with no other weapons for her defence, than prayer and patience, has outlived them all! But this could not be, if she had not been the work of God. In truth, the history of her trials during eighteen hundred years is the best evidence of her divine origin. Destitute of all earthly support and succor, she has conquered and outlived her mortal enemies; and even the powers of hell have not been able to prevail against her.

II. The apostle says: "There shall be a time, when they will not bear sound doctrine, but according to their own desires they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and will turn away, indeed, their hearing from the truth, and will be turned to fables." (2. Tim. 4: 3.)

Teachers, ready to proclaim what the multitude desires to hear, have never been wanting in the history of the world; and in the days of the primitive Church, this prediction of the Apostle was not long in being fulfilled. There have been unhappy men at all times, who could not bear the sound doctrine delivered to the Church, but preferred to it the fables and fabrications of proud heresiarchs. Sect after sect arose, according to that which was said: "There must be also heresies." (1. Cor. 11: 19.) "It must needs be that scandals come." (Matt. 18: 7.) Among themselves, these unstable people were constantly at variance, disputing with, and contradicting each other; and, although the doctrine of one sect widely differed from that of the other, yet they all claimed, in turn, to possess the true religion. But if they were divided among themselves upon all points of belief, they were firmly united, at least, in *one point* of resistance. They were all of one mind, my brethren, in their hatred against the Church established by Christ; they were all, as now, prepared to wage unceasing war against her; Herod and Pilate, forgetting their old-time enmity, became friends on the night of Christ's Passion; in order to compass his destruction. To undermine the foundations of the true Church, to break down the bulwarks of that venerable, time-honored structure, is the end of which the imitators of Pilate and Herod have all labored with a zeal worthy of a better cause.—History, however, having taught them, that they could not prevail by violence against her,—behold, they have had recourse to artifice and subtilties. Paganism had loudly and boldly proclaimed its intention to

extirpate Christianity; the so-called Reformers carefully restrained from a like declaration. On the contrary, they pretended to have nothing in view, and nothing more at heart than the reformation of the Church. They asserted that the true Church had become corrupt; that the pure doctrine of Jesus lay buried under the rubbish of human opinions and laws, forgetting that such things were impossible, inasmuch as the Eternal Truth, himself, had expressly declared that he would be with his Church all days, even to the consummation of the world; and “that the gates of hell should never prevail against her.” (Matt. 16: 18.) These secret enemies, these wolves in sheep’s clothing, (as they are called by Christ), are more dangerous than open enemies. And if we must watch and pray, my brethren, so as not to fall into the open jaws of the devil, when “he goeth about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,” (1. Pet. 5: 8,)—who can resist his artifices, when he puts on the likeness of an angel of light, and seeks to seduce us with fair words and pious protestations? If anything earthly were able to undermine the foundations of the Church, and alienate the hearts of the children from their mother, it was this cruel artifice whereby she was assailed. But what was the result, dear Christians? These miserable heresiarchs who would fain have cast a slur upon the purity of Christ’s divine Spouse, have all labored in vain. The Ebionites, Marcionites, Arians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Pelagians, and numberless other sects,—where are they now? And echo answers: “Where?” They who labored to destroy the Church, who frequently foretold the year in which she would cease to be, they are all no more. The Church saw their end, and witnessed their destruction. Clouds of dust they raised, which for a little while darkened the exterior glory of the sun but they could not extinguish the resplendent lustre of that brilliant luminary. Even so, my brethren, all the various systems of religion, now in operation throughout the universe, will before long cease to be, but the Catholic Church will remain forever. Individuals, indeed, may be and, alas! are, estranged from the Church by the exertions of heretics, but against the Church, herself, they can never prevail; storms may break off the dry and withered branches from the sound parent-stem, but they spend their fury in vain against the mighty roots and trunk of the immortal Tree. For eighteen hundred years, the spirit of contradiction has labored to destroy her glorious growth, but the miserable assailants have all perished, like the pagans of old, by their own base weapons. Giant-like, the Church moves majestically over the ruins of the sects,—the melancholy evidence of their human origin. Truly, history, is her confirmation, dear Christians; in it the Holy Ghost gives testimony of our mighty, undying Mother, that she has conquered, and shall conquer the artifices and subtilties of heretics and infidels.

III. The description which history at the same time gives of the Church in the primitive ages of Christianity, is attractive and charming. “*The*

*multitude of the believers had but one heart and one soul;*" (Acts 4: 32.) "They were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles . . . and in prayers. . . . There was great fear in all. They had all things in common." (Acts 2: 42-44.) Their life was blameless, and although the Pagans hated the faith of those primitive Saints, they could not but admire the purity of their morals. Crimes were unknown among them; and Tertullian in his *Apology* could say to the pagan judges: "It is your own people that must be punished for crimes; who has ever found one among *us*?" The early Christians, in fact, converted a pagan world by the sanctity of their lives. Glorious were those times, my beloved brethren, and worthy our reverential admiration,—but unfortunately, they are past. Did we but illustrate our faith as *they* did, by the splendor of our morals, by an exact conformity of our practice to our faith, our exemplary lives would not only cause our holy religion to shine forth in all its native lustre and pristine beauty, but, also, employ it as an effectual means to bring about the conversion of numberless souls. Our separated brethren would no longer view our principles in their present unfavorable light; they would be disabused and enlightened. But, alas! the evident contradiction they observe between the belief and practice of wicked Catholics, scandalizes them to the highest degree, and by contributing to increase their prejudices, removes, them farther and farther from the truth. Bad example, in fact, my brethren, destroys in their hearts all the good dispositions which they might otherwise have. For who are they that slander the Church and her ministers the most? Who are they that disregard the authority of the Church? Who are they that believe one thing and do another? Who are they that disonor the purity of their faith by the wickedness of their lives? Who are they that, without fear, commit crimes of which the heathens, themselves, would be ashamed? Who are they? Are they Turks or heathens? No. Are they Jews? No. They are *bad Catholics*, who promised at Baptism to renounce the devil, and all his works and pomps. They are *unworthy Catholics* who would, if they could, do to the Church what the heathens could not accomplish. They are *wicked Catholics*, who only boast of the name of Catholic, when they do something disgraceful. Alas! the bad conduct of her immoral and unfaithful children is more injurious to the Church, than all the persecutions of her enemies; for the evil example of such unhappy men, cause our dissenting brethren to remain in ignorance of the truth; they judge from the bad behaviour of the children that the doctrines of the Mother must, also, be bad and corrupt. Such unfortunate Catholics are the greatest enemies of Christianity, they are the stumbling-blocks of the unenlightened, and the most dangerous persecutors of the Church. Through them, the name of God is blasphemed among unbelievers, and many foul aspersions are undeservedly thrown upon our doctrines; as if, in short, our holy and august Mother, the Church, countenanced and authorized the vicious practices of her unworthy children.

The divine Spouse of Christ, my brethren, has suffered much during the eighteen hundred years of her existence from the persecutions of unbelievers, the artifices and subtilties of heretics, and the scandalous conduct of many of her own children; but, in spite of all these trials and sufferings, she has never ceased to exist and to flourish. Her marvellous vitality, her perpetual youth are without a parallel in the history of the world. The most ancient Kingdom or Empire of earth cannot boast, as the Church can, of an existence of eighteen hundred years. The powers of hell have raged against her, and have used all the means at their disposal to destroy her; but their exertions have all been fruitless; her enemies have perished; and she stands as firm as ever in her beautiful and immortal youth, —the Bride of the Lamb, without a spot or wrinkle, clothed in “fine linen, glittering and white.” (Apoc. 19: 8.) Truly, the preservation of the Catholic Church amid so many trials for eighteen hundred years, is a miracle, and a greater miracle than the creation of the world. Her existence proves that she is the work of him to whom all power is given in heaven, and upon earth; of him, who has said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. To her we may, nay, we *must* entrust ourselves and our salvation, my brethren; for she, alone, is the true and only saving Church; the Church of Jesus, than whose sweet name there is none other “under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4: 12.) This God-Man, Jesus, has commanded all to hear and obey his Church; and of him who does not hear the Church he says, “let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican.” (Matt. 18: 17.) But “blessed are they,” says his Beloved Disciple, “that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb; that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates of the city,” (Apoc. 22: 14,) —yea, my brethren, even of the city of God, the holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church. Amen.

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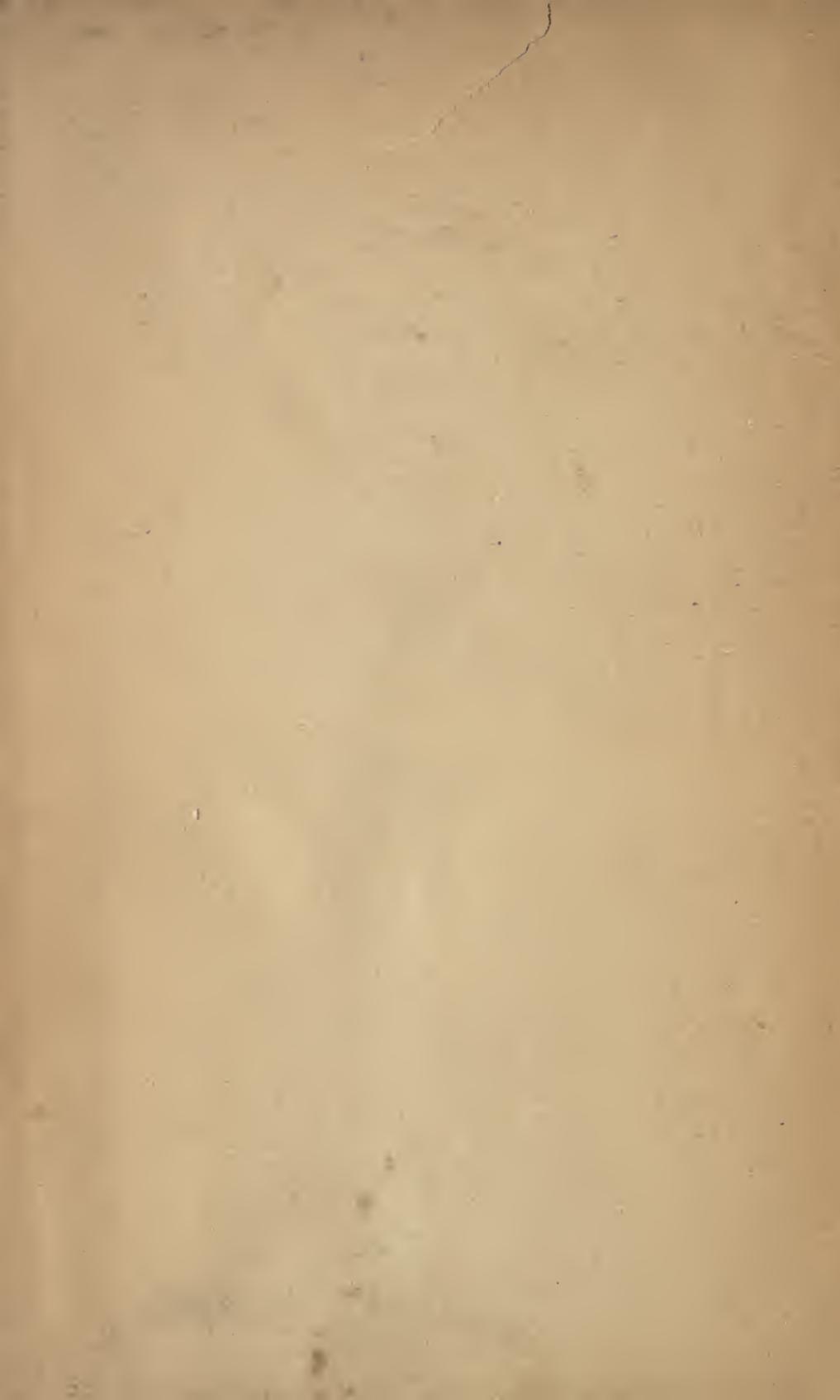
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